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Dec/Jan 2002 Volume 33 No 6

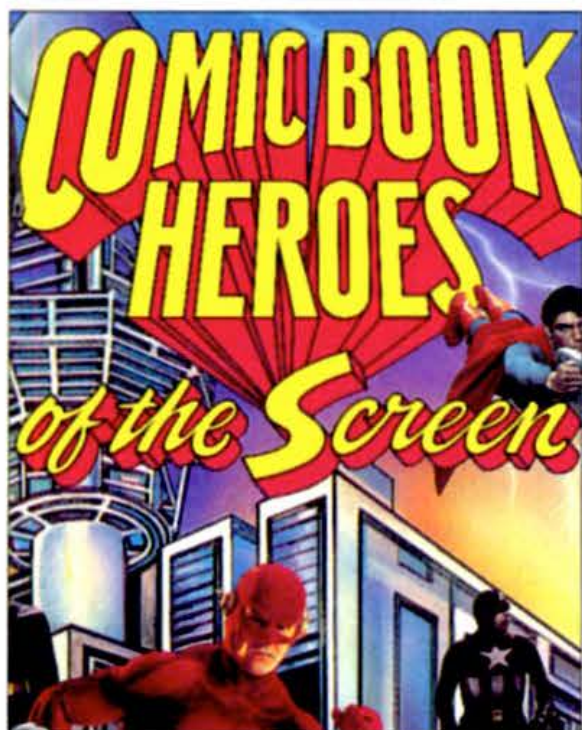


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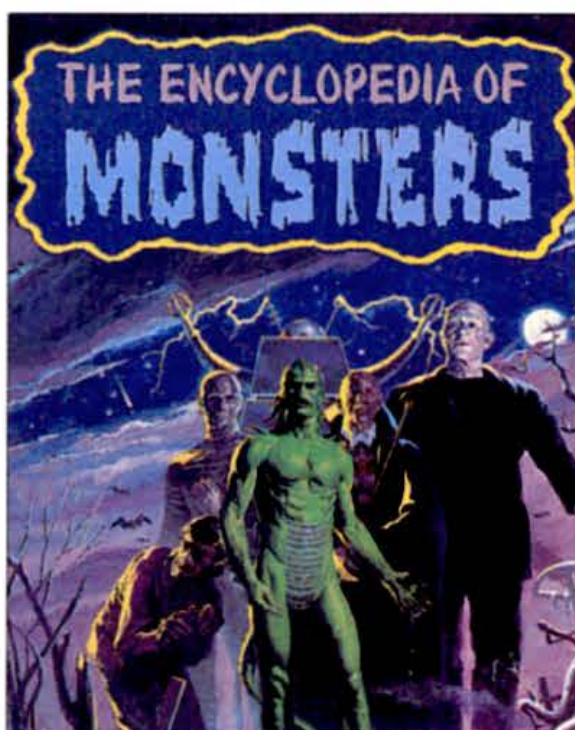
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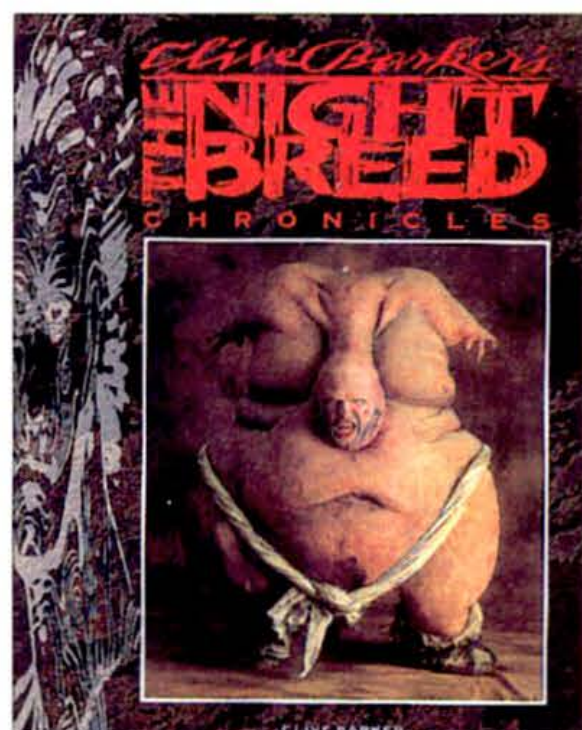
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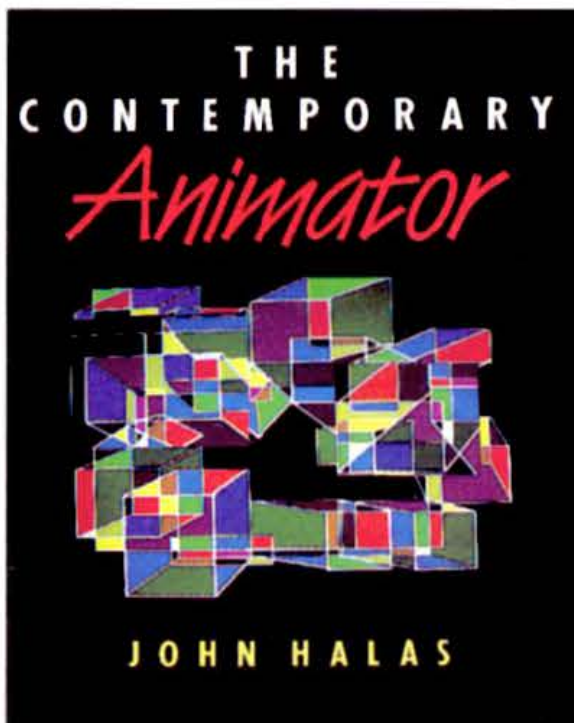
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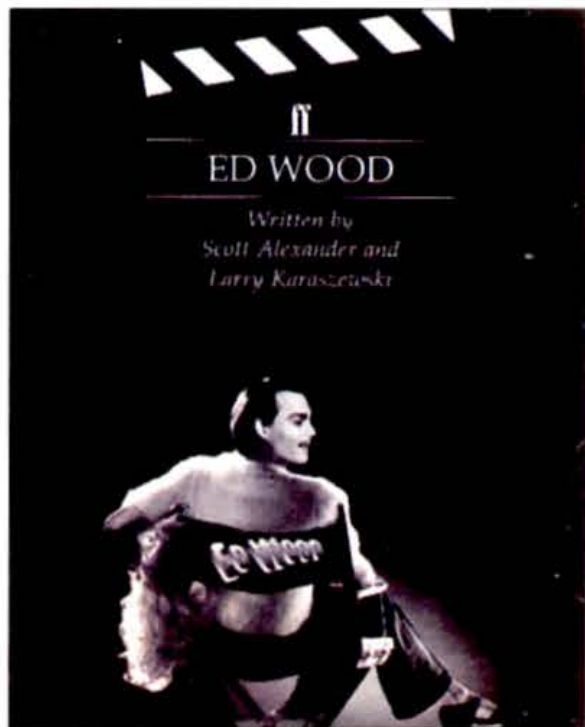
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**L**isten, it's not enough that this magazine is packed front page to back with speculation; our whole existence is built around a science fiction concept: the time-warp. Where you are, it's November or December—you're finalizing travel plans for your family's Thanksgiving dinner or drafting your Christmas card list and battling crowds at the local Toys 'R' Us. Where I am, it's the last week in September, and I and my fellow New Yorkers, who might otherwise be figuring out what we're going to be doing over the Columbus Day weekend and stocking up on our Halloween candy (yes, you usually have to do it this early), find a lot of this activity to be frankly blunted by events of recent weeks. In normal times, this magazine would simply yield to the force of the warp and pretend that it is the time displayed on the cover. But we're honestly too close to the disaster right now, and we can't carry on as normal until we address it, and particularly how it might impact what you typically find in these pages.

It can fairly be said that in the days following the World Trade Center attack, we saw America at its best. Across the country, people set aside their own concerns to provide support—material, financial, and moral—to the rescue effort in New York. Partisan politics were forsaken in order to demonstrate to ourselves and the world that such attempts to strike at the basic structure of our society would fail utterly. In the span of a few days, we pulled together and became a greater people, worthy of the ideals that originally founded this country.

Some of us didn't quite make it, though. Not one day after the disaster, the following press release arrived in the CFQ e-mail box (names have been changed to protect the guilty and to keep the culpable parties from capitalizing on this any more than is deserved):

"Back-Alley Productions announces that, due to many story similarities of their production of INDEPENDENCE DAY RIPOFF #248 to the tragic and horrific events surrounding the World Trade

production, and wasn't slated for release until well into 2002. How delicate did the producers consider American sensibilities that we couldn't countenance a science fiction war-film *a full year* after the WTC

attack? Stunned as we are as a result of recent events, it'll take a lot more than what we've undergone to make us so timorous of shadows played out on a movie screen.

There's been a lot of talk about what will happen to our culture. Some have declared this the "End of Irony;" others

think we'll never be able to return to the action/adventure tropes that over the span of decades have been embedded into our films and television.

I have doubts about both stands. I can't say I'd miss having to sit through another ninety-minute abomination in which generic terrorists attempt to sink a boat or derail a train or nuke a city while some Bruce Willis wannabe single-handedly undoes their plans at the same time he's broadcasting taunting one-liners over a cell phone. Nor will I particularly grieve the loss of those movies, TV shows, and commercials where every sentiment is bracketed in air-quotes just because their creators lack the courage to face the power of genuine emotion.

But I also suspect that some of the people advocating our abandonment of irony are the same ones who, since the '60s, have been desperately seeking a reversion of our culture back to one that never actually existed, one where good, right-thinking Americans rallied at bond drives, one where the airwaves crackled with nothing more strident than the sounds of the Andrews Sisters, where couples waited until they were married, and darkies sat in the back of the bus, where they belonged. Such people fail to understand that irony, intelligently deployed, is not just a glib rejection of emotion, but a useful

## DO WE REALLY NEED A NEW CULTURE?

Center attack, production is forced to go on hiatus. For at least one to two weeks, the principals at Back-Alley Productions will assess the project's potential effects on the spirit of the world.

"INDEPENDENCE DAY RIPOFF #248 director I. M. Tohndeph comments, 'I don't, in any way, wish to potentially contribute to the pain and grief of those affected by this senseless act of terror.'

"The hearts and condolences of the principals, cast, and crew of Back-Alley Productions' INDEPENDENCE DAY RIPOFF #248 go out to all of those who are suffering from this loss."

My first reaction to this was, *How crass*. Trust me, INDEPENDENCE DAY RIPOFF #248 is not one those high-profile, big-budget Hollywood films that everyone knows about and is looking forward to. This press release is less about the impact the attack has had on a film project than a particularly ill-advised attempt to bring this production to the attention of people who weren't aware of its existence to begin with. In light of events that were still occurring at the point this missive arrived, the producers' transparent feint at nobility was, shall we say, not especially appreciated.

My second thought was, *How craven*. INDEPENDENCE DAY RIPOFF #248 had not even started



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examination of how humanity permits itself to be shielded from reality by the cynical deployment of sentimentality. (Anyone who doubts its usefulness has never seen William Wellman's phenomenal *NOTHING SACRED*, a film that may accrue more and more relevance in the coming months.)

I also doubt that, even after so tragic an event, we are going to abandon our need for action and adventure. In varying degrees, the best action/adventure films allow us to explore both our strengths and weaknesses, how they convey the ways our society, when tested, may survive, and how they suggest to us—in the inquest into our darker natures—the ways we may fall. No doubt, accepting our desire for thrills means we're setting ourselves up for an influx of film and television that will continue to be, face it, unadulterated crap (much of it likely inspired by the WTC attack itself). But it's nothing more or less than what we have had to endure to get to those works that move us, that inspire us, that help us understand ourselves and why we must endure. If we have to go through Schwarzenegger to get to such enlightenment, it will still be worth the effort. —Dan Persons



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Super-strength? Of course. X-ray vision? Sorta. Red and blue tights? That's so comic book! It's the youth of Superman, but hipper, edgier, and prettier (hey, what do you want? It's the WB). **Frank Garcia** talks to the producers.

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**Publisher/Business Manager:** Celeste C. Clarke. **Editor:** Dan Persons. **Bureaus:** New York Dan Scapperotti. Los Angeles Mitch Persons. London Alan Jones. **Contributors:** Lawrence French, Frank Garcia, Miwa Hirai, Dennis Kleinman, Andrew Osmond, Ross Plesset, Craig Reid, Dan Scapperotti. **Editorial Operations Manager:** Lisa Tomczak-Walkington. **Editorial Production:** Liz Chilton, Lisa Coduto. **Advertising/Circulation Manager:** Mickey Wright.

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## SAMUEL Z. ARKOFF

1918 – 2001

by Lawrence French

Samuel Zachary Arkoff, whose legendary career was built on a steady stream of horror, sci-fi, fantasy, and assorted youth exploitation pictures, died on Sept 16, 2001, at age 83, in Burbank, California. The cigar-chomping Arkoff served for twenty-six years as the head of American International Pictures (AIP), the independent film company he co-founded in 1954 with his long-time partner, James H. Nicholson. Arkoff initially served as AIP's Vice President before becoming Chairman, finally assuming complete control of the firm in 1972 when Nicholson departed as President. Arkoff continued to head AIP until 1980, when he sold the company to Filmways, a move he later regretted, calling it the biggest mistake in his career.

Starting out as an entertainment lawyer, Arkoff quickly became adept at shrewd deal making, in the best, Hollywood mogul tradition. Later, when he met Jim Nicholson, a former exhibitor with a flair for showmanship, the duo immediately hit it off and decided to start their own distribution company with an initial investment of just \$3,000. The fledgling firm soon partnered with Roger Corman, who had just produced his first film, *THE FAST AND THE FURIOUS*, and suddenly AIP was off and running. "Jim and I thought the time was right to start a company," recalled Arkoff, "because the recent anti-trust decrees had separated the studios from ownership of their movie theaters. Also, the so-called television menace meant that all the studios were cutting back on their contract players. In reality, it was a very bad time to be starting out, but we didn't know any better."

Arkoff and Nicholson quickly zeroed-in on the alienated youth market, which had largely been ignored by the major studios. By shooting films in two weeks, on average budgets of \$100,000, AIP found it was easy to make profits, striking gold with exploitable titles like *IT CONQUERED THE WORLD*, *THE COOL AND THE CRAZY*, *DRAGSTRIP RIOT*, and *THE BEAST WITH A MILLION*



Building its reputation on B-movies with catchy titles, Arkoff's AIP established a more lasting place in film history with a series of Poe adaptations.

EYES.

Arkoff developed a drastic way of keeping pictures on schedule: "I'd always have our directors shoot the ending during the first week," he said. "Then if the director got behind during the second week, I'd simply go on the set and tear some pages out of the script until we were back on schedule."

In 1957, Jim Nicholson came up with a title which caused traffic jams at drive-ins: *I WAS A TEENAGE WEREWOLF*. The Herman J. Cohen production introduced Michael Landon to the screen, and led Arkoff and Nicholson to embark on a series of teenage monster movies, including *I WAS A TEENAGE FRANKENSTEIN* and Corman's *TEENAGE CAVEMAN*.

With AIP's success soon copied by multiple imitators, Arkoff set his sights on slightly classier material, bringing on Vincent Price to film *HOUSE OF USHER* with Roger Corman in 1960. "Later on," said Arkoff, "after the picture was a big success, both Jim and Roger contended I didn't want to make it, because there was no monster in it.... [That's] very obviously untrue. I don't say that Roger and Jim didn't like Poe either, but I was the real Poe aficionado at AIP!"

*HOUSE OF USHER* was an

event picture by AIP's standards, although its budget was only \$270,000. The film became a big hit, making over \$2 million, which led to a whole series of Poe films, including Arkoff's personal favorite, *THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM*, and culminating in Corman's masterpieces, *MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH* and *TOMB OF LIGEIA*.

Around the same time, AIP found a new market in America for Italian horror films and pseudo-epics, like *GOLIATH AND THE BARBARIANS* (starring Steve Reeves), and several Mario Bava films (including *BLACK SUNDAY* and *BLACK SABBATH*). "It wasn't until we began showing his pictures in America that he became well-known," recalled Arkoff. "That was really an instance of a man being born in the wrong country. If he had been born in England, where horror flourished, he might have been recognized as a premier director."

Throughout the '60s, Nicholson and Arkoff continued to make outstanding horror pictures, such as *BURN WITCH BURN*, *THE COMEDY OF TERRORS*, and *THE CONQUEROR WORM*. "We made more horror films than anyone else," Arkoff said, "usually about six or eight a year. We also put most of the great horror actors back to

work, like Boris Karloff, Basil Rathbone, Peter Lorre, and Lon Chaney, Jr. They were all established names in the horror market, that brought in the audiences, and they were all under-priced."

By the late '60s, AIP had also become the official studio of the counter-culture, releasing motorcycle films like Corman's *THE WILD ANGELS*, as well as hippie fantasies such as *WILD IN THE STREETS* and *THE TRIP*. In 1972, after James Nicholson left the company, AIP seemed to lose some of its focus, although Arkoff continued to churn out genre films with regularity, culminating in 1979 with *THE AMITYVILLE HORROR*, which earned \$65 million and became the most successful film in AIP's history. Arkoff noted that, once again, here was a horror film where "the house was the monster." 1979 also saw AIP honored with a twenty-fifth anniversary retrospective at New York's Museum of Modern Art. Vincent Price, laughing, recalled Arkoff's comment on hearing of the tribute: "If you wait long enough, everything becomes good taste." Later in the year, AIP released one of its most notorious flops, the all-star disaster movie, *METEOR*. Made for \$16 million, the film grossed just slightly more than \$2 million—ironically, about the same as what AIP's first big hit, *THE HOUSE OF USHER*, had taken in back in 1960.

In early 1980, Arkoff resigned as the head of AIP to become an independent producer, and during the last twenty years of his life planned many projects, but most never reached fruition due to financing difficulties.

Roger Corman fondly recalled his long working relationship with Arkoff by saying, "I think Sam was the best negotiator I ever met in the motion picture industry. He was instrumental, together with Jim Nicholson, in creating American International Pictures, and *THE HOUSE OF USHER* was really the picture that established them.... Together, Jim and Sam built AIP into the dominant independent production and distribution company in America."

CFQ



# SMALLVILLE

## *Expect a Few Surprises Don't Expect Any Red and Blue Spandex*

By Frank Garcia

Defying audiences' expectations is on the agenda for executive producers and writers Alfred Gough and Miles Millar. Their latest project, a twenty-first century reinvention of one of comic history's most beloved and successful superhero characters, Superman, has come to life as a new series, **SMALLVILLE**, from Warner Brothers Television. Gough and Millar have been tapped to give a new spin to the youthful life of Clark Kent, exploring in greater detail than ever before on film how the sole survivor from the planet Krypton, beginning at the tender age of fifteen, made his journey toward adulthood. And in this series, he prepared *not* to hear the name "Superboy."

"Our goal is to challenge expectations," declared Miles Millar. "If you think you know Smallville, if you think you know what Clark Kent is about, the purpose of the show is to be intrigued and surprised. It's not what you think. If we can do that, we've succeeded."

Although the adventures of Clark Kent as Superboy is well-documented in the DC

Comic books, his growth as a character has never really had a well-defined depiction on film, not even in the 1988-1992 syndicated series, **THE ADVENTURES OF SUPERBOY**. What Millar and Gough are doing is revising the chronology in Clark's history. We will see the future Superman as he discovers and develops his vast array of super powers.

Millar and Gough were on the set in Vancouver, Canada, shooting **SMALLVILLE**'s pilot, helmed by David Nutter, one of television's most celebrated genre directors (**MILLENNIUM**, **ROSWELL**, **DARK ANGEL**). "David was very good because he had directed **ADVENTURES OF SUPERBOY**," said Gough. "We said, 'David, if you saw it on **SUPERBOY**, we can't do it on this show.' He's been very good about that. He's got knowledge and a certain appreciation of the character; he's always been a huge fan. He's helped keep the level of reality that we want to keep on the show."

"The challenge is how to do something fresh. Our objective is to get inside Clark Kent's head," added

Millar. "Why and how he became the Man of Steel and, when he goes to Metropolis, how does his upbringing in Smallville really affect that?"

"To me, he's always been very earnest and goody-two shoes. I never understood why he did what he did. That's the core to the story: why he does what he does. Why he becomes so noble."

"You know how the story ends, but how does the journey begin?" said Gough. "It's like **STAR WARS**. You know what happens in **A NEW HOPE**, **EMPIRE STRIKES BACK**, and **RETURN OF THE JEDI**. With **THE PHANTOM MENACE**, you get to see how it all begins. This one is the same way. For instance, here, Luthor is a couple of years older than Clark and they're best friends. And Lana Lang is the girl of his dreams."

"The biggest change in Superman's mythology is that when Clark comes to Earth in the ship, it brings a meteor shower with him. Kryptonite takes out Smallville—it kills Lana's parents, and Lex is there that day with his father. Lionel Luthor is sort of a big, powerful businessman from Metropolis. That's the day he loses his hair, when he's nine years old. That's the day Clark comes to Earth."

"When Lana grows up, she wears a piece of the meteor as a necklace. Of course, it's kryptonite. So when Clark gets nearer, he gets weak in the knees. They think it's a teenage crush, but it's actually a piece of the kryptonite. Because of the meteor shower, we've got kryptonite deep in the ground and strange things happen in Smallville. It's got a **TWIN PEAKS**-like feeling: Things appear normal on the surface, but underneath, there's something always going on. The stories emerge from there."

"It's not about larger-than-life villains coming to Smallville; it's more about how does kryptonite affect the people of the town and [how] Lex is now back in town running his father's company. Is he going to bring big businesses into town? How will that change the environment?"

**SMALLVILLE** stars newcomer Tom

**NEW TAKE ON AN OLD RIVALRY:** Clark Kent (Tom Welling, left) has to live with the knowledge that his arrival on Earth led to the tragedy that haunts Lex Luthor (Michael Rosenbaum).





Welling (JUDGING AMY) in the lead role of Clark Kent. Veteran actor John Schneider (DUKES OF HAZZARD) climbs aboard as Jonathan Kent, with Cynthia Ettinger (SILENCE OF THE LAMBS) as Martha Kent. For the full series, actress Annette O'Toole, who played Clark Kent's red-haired girlfriend Lana Lang in SUPERMAN III, takes over as Martha.

Vancouver actress Kristin Kreuk, a relative newcomer, is Lana Lang. (She played Snow White in a new movie-of-the-week from producer/director Caroline Thompson.) Eric Johnson is Whitney, a classmate and football player who is Lana's boyfriend. Sara Jane Redmond is Nell, Lana Lang's aunt. Michael Rosenbaum is the soon-to-be villainous Lex Luthor. Allison Mack plays Chloe Sullivan, an original character who is Clark's classmate and has ambitions to move to Metropolis. Sam Jones III is Clark's close friend, Pete Ross, a character well-known in the comics, here an African American.

"We had a long time to cast for TV. Usually you get a month, but for this one we had four months," noted Millar, who also revealed the high volume of auditioners. The producers sifted through fifteen tapes, each containing about thirty auditions. "We looked in New York, Chicago, L.A., Minneapolis, Toronto, and Vancouver. Kristin's tape was from Vancouver; Tom came to us from Los Angeles—he was just someone who came into the room."

"Tom just had a certain charm and charisma," said Gough. "He had a naive innocence which was great, because you can't act that; you either have it or you don't."

When it comes to villainy, everyone had a preconceived notion of what Lex Luthor was all about. "The hardest guy to find, and the guy we found last, was Michael Rosenbaum," said Gough. "Our feeling was to take the name Lex Luthor out of the equation. He's just a guy who's never lived up to his father's expectations. Life has made him bald, and what does that do to you? How does that form your personality?"

"He's never going to be good in his father's eyes. He's sent to private schools. He knows how to protect himself in a fight, but he's very charismatic. Being bald, he has to find a way to draw people towards him. We just said we wanted a young Michael Keaton: He's charming, charismatic, but there's also a sense of danger. That's how we see Lex. The danger is there, but he's not maniacal or evil."

Relatively new to Hollywood, but fast-rising, Millar and Gough won this super-job from Peter Roth, president of Warner Brothers Television, who was eager to shepherd the SMALLVILLE project before the cameras. "He'd gotten the rights to doing a Young Clark Kent series," explained Gough. "We thought that was really cool. Batman was inherently cool—we had the

movies from ten years ago. Certainly the first two movies were very dark and interesting and different from the old television series. That's when we came up with the idea of a meteor shower to bring a lot of strange things to Smallville. In the pilot, [Clark] learns his origins, and comes to realize he's sort of responsible for this. Over the course of the show, he will right that."

Millar and Gough made their entry into Hollywood via a UCLA screenwriting program, and landed a story-editing gig with the short-lived 1997 TV series, TIME COP. In 1998, they signed on as producers of MARTIAL LAW, and later on wrote features like Jackie Chan's SHANGHAI NOON (2000).

Millar and Gough revealed that the inspiration for their "take" on the Superman mythos was right there in the 1978 Richard Donner feature: According to Gough it's to "understand the man before you get into the superhero that everyone knows. That's why the movie was such a hit—it really did that for the first time."

Both praised Donner's ability to keep the film grounded in reality. "We learned a lot from him," said Gough. "That's always been his philosophy, and certainly was his philosophy with SUPERMAN. We're trying to go from that point too; keep [Clark Kent] grounded and relatable. The more relatable he is as a person, the more believable he is as a superhero."

In spite of the writers' very personal interpretation, they still had to make sure that SMALLVILLE was an approach that Superman's bosses at DC Comics would approve of. "We sat down to talk with [DC Comics Publisher] Jenette Kahn at DC Comics and it's interesting to see how Superman evolved," said Gough. "At the very beginning, he didn't fly, he leaped.... Kryptonite didn't come into the mythology until the [1940's] radio program: [Bud Collyer] did the show [three times] every week, but in his contract, he had a two-week vacation. There was no such thing as reruns in radio, so they created the idea of kryptonite to show a weakened Superman, and they put in a different actor who had a different voice. It's interesting how some of the cornerstones of the Superman mythology were



**YUP, IT'S THE WB:** Bringing the Superman legend into present day with a cast of attractive young actors, the producers of SMALLVILLE hope to rid the superhero of his goody-goody stigma.

built."

In the course of filming the pilot, one of Millar and Gough's greatest challenges was something very unexpected: How to find a corn field to create that small-town Kansas feel? "We started growing corn in a hot-house here in Vancouver, and then we went out and bought fake corn," explained Gough. "Then we're going to use CGI for other elements."

"When you think about it, there's no corn, anywhere! We looked in Texas, in California, Florida, places that you think probably have it. Nope!" said Millar.

"The corn became quite an issue. We needed it for the 'A' story that we're telling," said Gough.

As the series develops, Clark will learn about his Kryptonian heritage and realize he's the sole survivor of a destroyed planet. "He's obviously very interested in where he came from," said Gough. "He crashed on Earth, and he certainly has the ship that he came in and what's in that ship and how that leads him. When we get to series, down the road, we're definitely going to explore that. There's something set up in the pilot that will allow us, down the road, to unlock the secret to Krypton."

"The temptation is to go to the end of the series, where everyone knows what's going to happen," said Millar. "It's not actually what you think. People who have read the script have been surprised: 'It's not what I thought it would be.'"

"You probably won't see 'The Suit' until the last minute of the last show!" said Gough.

CFQ



# Brotherhood of the WOLF

## *French History Gets Filtered Through Hong Kong Action*

By Dan Scapperotti

**D**uring the eighteenth-century reign of Louis XV, something called the Beast of Gevaudan killed 120 young women and children in a remote French province. Believing the killings were the work of wolves, hundreds of the animals were hunted down and slaughtered, but the killings continued. With the monarch's failure to solve the mystery fueling the revolutionary spirit that was beginning to take hold in the country, King Louis eventually had a bizarre creature built and paraded through Paris to prove that the beast was dead. Although the murders continued, the episode was covered up.

This legend served as the basis for

BROTHERHOOD OF THE WOLF, the new Christophe Gans film being distributed by Universal Pictures. In the film, Fronsac (Samuel Le Bihan), the royal gardener, is dispatched to clear up the situation. Accompanying him is his friend Mani (Mark Dacascos), an Iroquois Indian who has a special attachment to nature and a savage fighting skill. They meet Jean-Francois (Vincent Cassel), a bitter nobleman who has lost an arm, and his beautiful sister Marianne (Emilie Dequenne). Despite all Fronsac's efforts the mysterious killer eludes him.

"It became a huge scandal," said Gans. "Louis XV was criticized because nobody was able to catch this beast, and basically, he decided to bury the case. Maybe it was a serial

killer, maybe it was a big feline imported from the colonies. What was certain: it was not a wolf. It became a legend after years and years, and folklore in France. Basically, it's the only monster from French folklore.

"The movie is pretty violent, but it's not as violent as what we know about the victims in the reality. For example: some of the girls were torn and mutilated in a very sexual way—maybe it was a serial killer dressed as an animal. What interested me was that the story happened at a very special moment in French history, the moment when they started to talk about equality and things like that. It was interesting that, at

the moment where French society started to be modern, we have this strange case of a monster coming from superstition; we have something coming from the Dark Ages to the Middle Ages' state-of-mind and killing people. We remember this story in France because this monster case took place in that special moment where the Dark Age stops and the modern age starts. It's not a depiction of what really happened, it's a fantasy."

Christophe Gans, movie buff, was not looking to become Christophe Gans, director, but his love of cinema—especially Asian cinema—led him down the path that put him behind the camera on a trio of genre films. The French director loved the Japanese manga books, especially the *Crying Freeman* series and its anime counterpart. He wanted to do an adaptation of the manga, so, as an exercise

FOR SPRING, WE USED LAKES OF DELICIOUS BROWN GRAVY: Potato flakes made a biodegradable stand-in for snow on BROTHERHOOD OF THE WOLF's location shoots.







**IT TAKES MUSCLES TO MULCH:** A series of grisly murders brings out Fronsac (Samuel Le Bihan, above and left), a skilled swordsman and gardener (stop laughing).



ship to movies is not exactly the same relationship as a normal director. I never had the feeling to become a film director. I would have happily stayed a film buff. Everything I'm doing

though they swarmed to buy tickets. Said Gans, "This kind of movie existed forty years ago, especially in Italy, but it doesn't exist anymore. I tried to make one last of this breed. In America, you call this Euro-trash. I like this kind of movie.

"I wanted to make a straight, first-degree horror movie. Many people want to make a genre film with a lot of humor, a lot of parody

and without securing any rights, Gans wrote a screenplay based on the comic.

He met the Japanese owner of the rights, who was so impressed with Gans's screenplay that he offered him a chance to direct the European segment of the fantasy film *THE NECRIMICON*. Based on his work on that film, Gans was hired to direct the live-action version of *CRYING FREEMAN*.

"I have a strange, passionate relationship with a movie called *THE KILLER* by John Woo," said Gans. "I fell in love with that film. When you fall in love with a girl, you can only stop that relationship by falling in love with another girl. I used *CRYING FREEMAN* to solve my strange relationship with *THE KILLER*. I did *CRYING FREEMAN* as a feminine version of *THE KILLER*. I really wanted to make a *KILLER* that would please the feminine audience, that would please the girls."

Since his cinematic roots are as a film fan and critic, Gans feels he brings a unique perspective to filmmaking. "My relation-

comes with my special relationship to movies made by different directors. I never try to intellectualize what I'm doing.

"I'm different from directors working in France. People working in France try to intellectualize a lot what they are doing. I just try to make a movie for my pleasure and that is what I tried to do with *CRYING FREEMAN* and *BROTHERHOOD OF THE WOLF*."

Taking a weather-beaten page from French history that involved murder, political intrigue, conspiracy, and a cover-up, Gans fashioned an exciting, multi-level tale that ultimately didn't sit well with his fellow countrymen, al-

**OUTDOORS ACTION:** Director Christophe Gans used actual locations to lend an air of reality to *WOLF*'s fantasy.





feeling, but I wanted to make a pure genre film. My passion for movies started when I was twelve when I was seeing films like *THE WILD BUNCH*, the swordfighting films from China, the Bruce Lee movies, and European westerns like *DJANGO*. When I'm making a movie, I try to remember what my feeling was when I was twelve watching these movies. So on the set I don't try to think about what I'm doing. I just try to feel what I'm doing, feel like a twelve-year-old kid again."

For the lead role of Fronsac, Gans cast Samuel Le Bihan, a young actor who had won the *Prix Jean Gabin* for his role in *VENUS BEAUTY SALON*. "He is one of the few physical actors that we have in France," said the director. "I like to work with him because basically he does his own stunts. He and Vincent Cassel, who plays the bad guy, are impressive at the end of the film fighting together—

they have not been doubled in the action. It was kind of a risk to have only two normal actors doing the big climax fight, but I wanted to make something great. So I took the only two physical actors in France, Vincent and Samuel, to make this climax really strong."

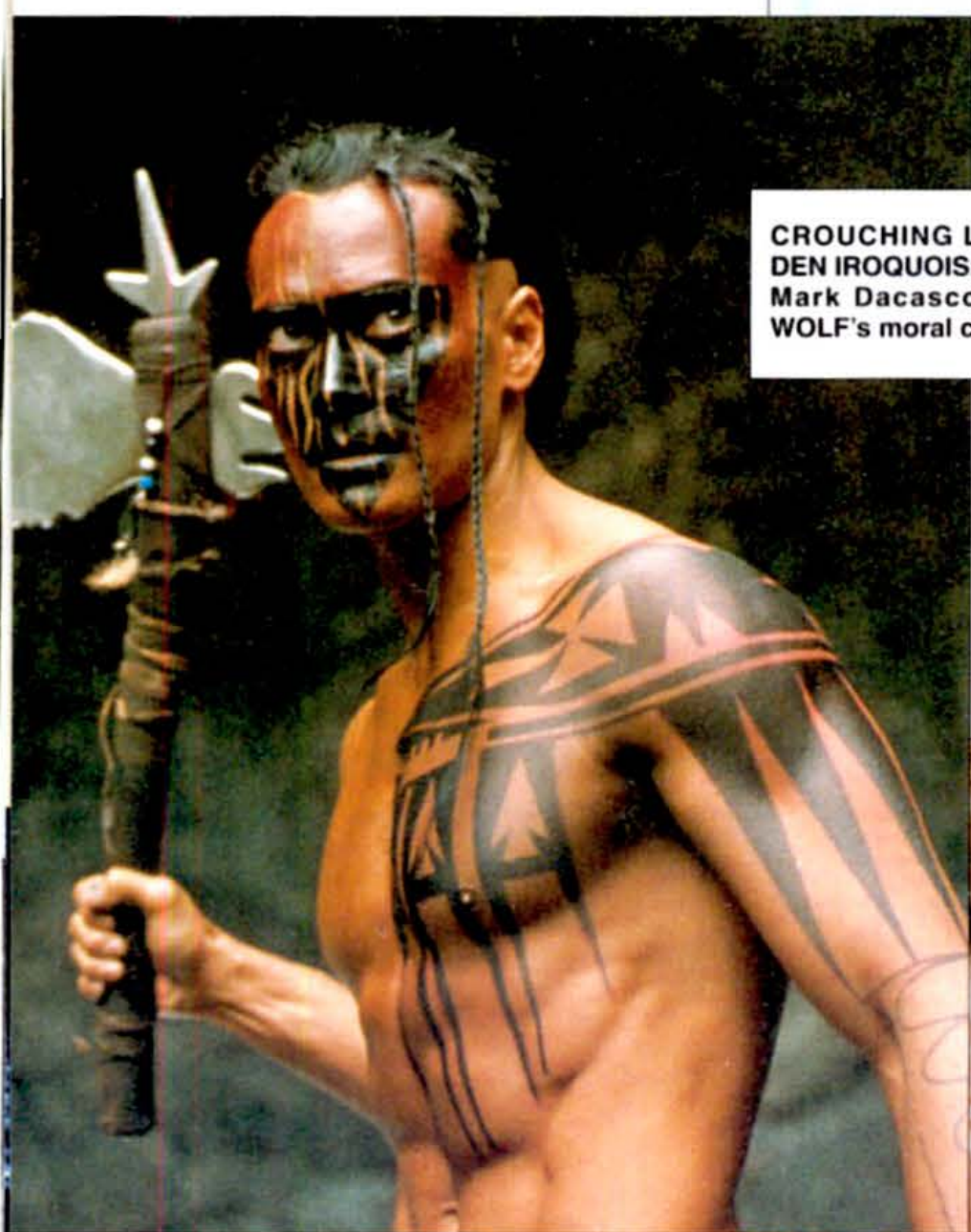
To play the Iroquois Indian, Mani, Gans tapped his *CRYING FREEMAN* star Mark

FREEMAN. For me, he is the center of the film. I try to express my own morality and my own values. I think that the character of the Indian in *BROTHERHOOD OF THE WOLF* is the only pure character in the film, pure in the sense of morality. He likes nature, he likes the animals, and he's right from the beginning."

The subtext of a gallant knight riding out



**CROUCHING LUPINE, HIDDEN IROQUOIS:** Gans regular Mark Dacascos serves as *WOLF*'s moral center.



Dacascos. "The hero of my childhood was Bruce Lee," said Gans. "Basically, he was an ethnic hero. As a kid, I wasn't watching a white guy, I was watching a yellow guy, an Asian hero, and it was Bruce Lee. Mark represents my feelings in this film and in *CRYING*

to slay the dragon was a conscious effort on the part of the director to emulate a theme in Asian films. "I tried to make a tale of chivalry using this story," Gans said. "I wanted to show that if we want to kill the dragon we may have to say 'goodbye' to the knight, because the knight lives to defend us against the dragon. This is a tale of the last knight in France. In that way, it is a movie that is close to John Woo films from





Hong Kong. I really think that *THE KILLER* is a chivalry movie. It is the last moment of certain ideas of chivalry. I'm very influenced by Hong Kong cinema. I like the melancholy aspect of the last moment of chivalry."

Working with a \$29 million budget—a fortune in terms of French cinema—Gans was faced with challenges on every side, including an envy issue. "There was a lot of pressure on my shoulders," said the director. "When you're doing a big-budget film in France, everybody is anxious and everybody is against you, because you're using more money than a normal director. By luck, the movie has been one of the big winners of the year. We sold two million tickets in one week. It was a huge success."

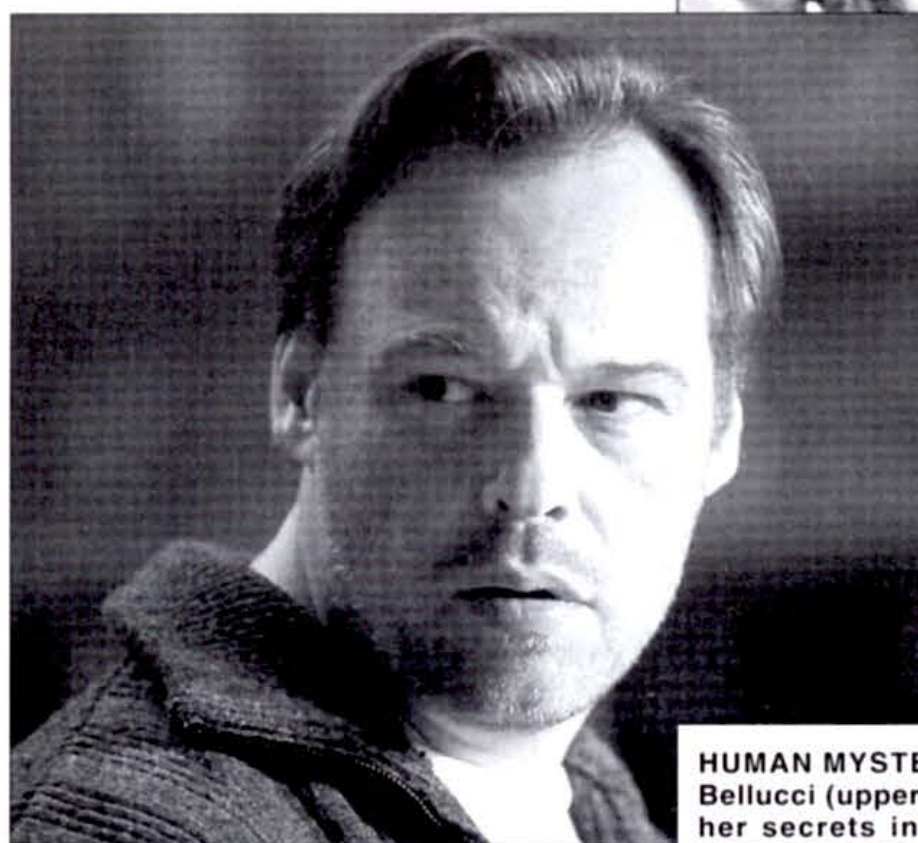
Since the story takes place over several years, it was necessary to capture seasonal changes as convincingly as possible. With the exception of one sequence—where the creature gets into the cellar of a house and destroys the building—the entire movie was shot on location. "Everything was fake," laughed Gans, who likes to treat location shoots no differently than sound-stage-based productions. "When I'm doing location scouting and I decide to shoot in a certain area, I want a fake element that we're going to bring on the real location. So we'll transport fake trees or fake snow. We are changing the reality to something that makes it half a stage and half a location. You have to work a lot to do that. The producers don't like that very much."

"I like the fact that audiences like the reality. They like to see it shot on location. They like to see the real sky, but at the same time the audience likes the sophistication of a completely different world. So I try to mix the two feelings, like the real sky and something that is a pure creation. For example: when we shot the sequence in the snow, we shot that in July, the snowflakes were made with potatoes. Potato snowflakes. It's beautiful! It worked very well, but when we were shooting the sequence it was very hot and we were invaded by mosquitoes. People who see the film say 'Oh the snow landscape is so beautiful,' but it's all fake. I like to trick the people."

Realizing that the films were similar, an anxious Gans went to see Tim Burton's *SLEEPY HOLLOW* a week before filming began. "I knew that it was basically the same story. When I saw it, I was relieved because it is completely on a stage and I knew my movie would be completely on location and would be very different."

The beast in *BROTHERHOOD* is a nebulous creature glimpsed only in quick cuts and basically hidden beneath a layer of armor. "My idea about the beast was that it

was created by someone who had made a long trip to Africa," he said. "The beast must look like a tribal fetish, voodoo. I wanted something that was a strange mix of iron and bones, like some voodoo thing. I wanted there to be a touch of pathos to my beast at the end of the film. I have a very classic vision of monsters in cinema. For instance the [Frankenstein monster] played by Boris Karloff. The monster must be touching; the monster is only a monster because the context is monstrous. My beast is a monster because the human being has made it a monster. My monster is not respon-



**HUMAN MYSTERY:** Monica Bellucci (upper right) holds her secrets in *BROTHERHOOD OF THE WOLF*. LEFT: Director Christophe Gans.

sible for what it is doing—I was very focused on the fact that, at the end, my beast had to be touching.

To create his beast, Gans went to London and met with the people at Jim Henson's Creature Shop effects house. He envisioned a combination of animatronics and digital effects, and the Henson studios were able to handle both devices. "This is the first monster movie made in France since George Melies," Gans explained. "It's amazing, but that's the case. There have been no monsters in French cinema in one hundred years. I was very comfortable that Henson would assume everything both digital and animatronic, because I knew that if we had to change, say, to all-digital I would have the same people in front of me. Basically they saved us, because we don't know how to do those kinds of effects here in France."

The film works on many levels: a horror film; an action/adventure yarn; an historic drama. "My movie is like a big smorgasbord," Gans explained. "I tried to imagine a movie for people that gives them a lot to eat, a great dinner."



"I have not necessarily been well received by some people. Some people find my movie pretty difficult to digest because it has too much in it. I think that the movie is very exotic for you. I imagine it's like a movie from Hong Kong: you see these big sets and costumes and colors, and you're just happy to have all that on the screen. But in France, it's very different. People have a particular relationship with the culture in France, and to the history."

Some of the people think I don't have a right to take French history and shoot it as a big fantasy."

Gans tries to integrate his action sequences into the storyline. He feels that, in too many films, big action set-pieces stop the story, and when the action stops, the story resumes. "I tried to make my action scene as narrative as any other scene," he said. "I tried to make my action scenes as symbolic as I can. At the end, Fronsac is fighting with twin daggers because he is both himself and his friend in one body. The bad guy uses a strange bone sword, because it's like his missing arm. Like in Hong Kong film, I want the people to be struck by the symbolism and imagery. I like to have the Indian fighting in the cave with people with clothes, I like to make it as expressionistic as I can, as primitive as I can."

"I feel that my action scenes are very primitive. They are action scenes like in the old movies. It's staged like a ballet, not something that is real. Rather, I create a strange imagery into the action."

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# THE TIME

## It's a Family Affair When H.G. Wells's

By Dan Scapperotti

If you can point to any writer as the fountainhead of science fiction, it would have to be H.G. Wells. The Englishman gave us primary works on invisibility, invaders from Mars, and time travel. How many thousands of pieces of literature are based on those premises? Producer George Pal tapped into Wells's worlds with his 1953 version of *WAR OF THE WORLDS* and adapted *THE TIME MACHINE* in 1960. Now Wells's 1895 novel returns to the screen in Dreamworks Pictures' *THE TIME MACHINE*, directed by Wells's great-grandson, and scheduled for a 2002 release.

Simon Wells trained as an artist and has previously worked at the London-based studios of animator Richard Williams. When Williams left to become director of animation on 1984's *WHO FRAMED ROGER RABBIT*, Wells was tapped for a supervising posi-

tion on the film. Afterward, Steven Spielberg invited Wells to set up an animation facility in London, where he eventually directed such feature-length cartoons as *AN AMERICAN TAIL 2: FIEVEL GOES WEST* and *WE'RE BACK: A DINOSAUR'S STORY*. When Dreamworks was founded, Wells was recruited to relocate to California and set up its animation studio. There, he directed *PRINCE OF EGYPT*.

While he had been successful in the animation field, Wells wanted to branch out and direct a live-action feature. "I've been looking to move across into live action for several years, mostly because they're the kind of movies I go to see in movie theatres," said Wells. "I don't go to see a lot of animated movies unless I have friends who worked on them—I don't have a great affection for the genre."

But how does a cartoon guy make the leap to live action? "Because of my animation background, I'm uniquely suit-

ed to do heavy special-effects films," said the director with a laugh. "Of course that's a difficult thing to pitch: I've never directed a live action movie before, but I ought to do a big-budget, special-effects movie. I'd be good at it."

Having read in the trades that Spielberg was thinking of directing a remake of *THE TIME MACHINE*, Wells approached his boss Jeffrey Katzenberg and mentioned that if Spielberg decided against the project, he would like the opportunity. A skeptical Katzenberg told Wells he'd be considered, but made no promises. Eventually Wells met with producers Walter Parks and Laurie MacDonald. "They were very interested in my story ideas and my take on the movie," said Wells, "but were nervous that I wasn't a tried-and-tested director in that field. Eventually, they came back to me and said the direction I wanted to take the story

was the way they wanted to go."

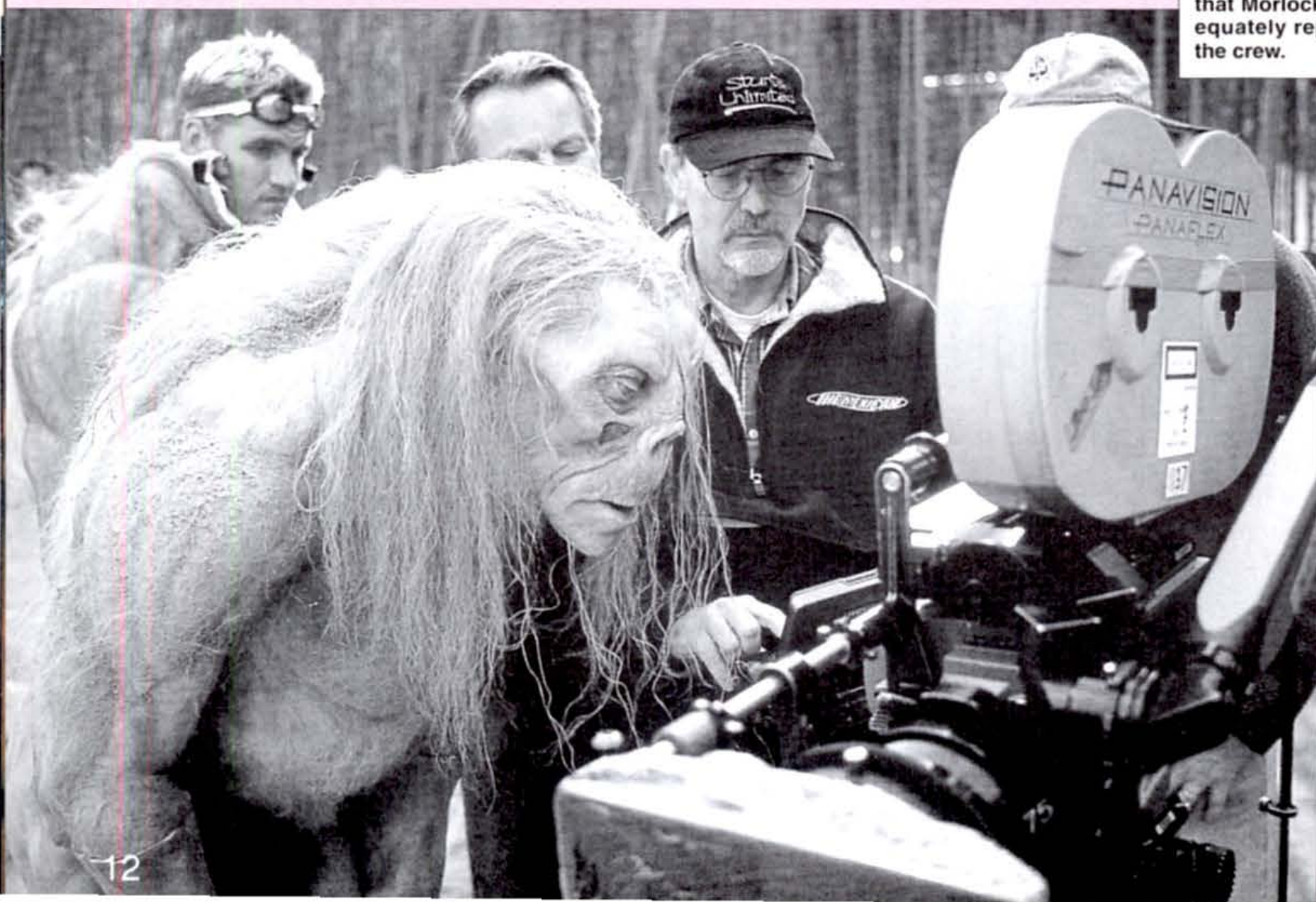
The new version—starring Guy Pearce, Samantha Mumba, Mark Addy, Philip Bosco, and Jeremy Irons—incorporates elements from the novel, the earlier Pal film, and original material. "It follows the traditional 1960 George Pal movie," said Wells. "It parts from the structure of that movie in different ways, as the George Pal movie departs from the structure of the book. There are story ideas in George Pal's that don't come from the book, such as the whole idea that the time traveler doesn't want to build machines for the war department and [that he] sees the nuclear holocaust in 1966. They also made the Eloi humans instead of the evolved version of humanity. In the book they're four-foot-high, little furry things;

they're not human. The time traveler never communicates and Weena—the character in the George Pal film

played by Yvette Mimieux—is sort of a sweet-but-puppy-like creature that plays at his feet and follows him around. There is no romantic love there."

The protagonist—known in the novel simply as "the time traveler"—was called "George" in David Duncan's script, but is known as "Alexander Hartdegen" in the actual film. Another major departure from the first film is that John Logan's screenplay has created a backstory for the main character, introducing a tragic rationale for the building of the time machine. "This in turn has a bigger personal story that

**AFFIRMATIVE ACTION FOR CANNIBALS:** Production was halted briefly when protests revealed that Morlocks weren't adequately represented on the crew.





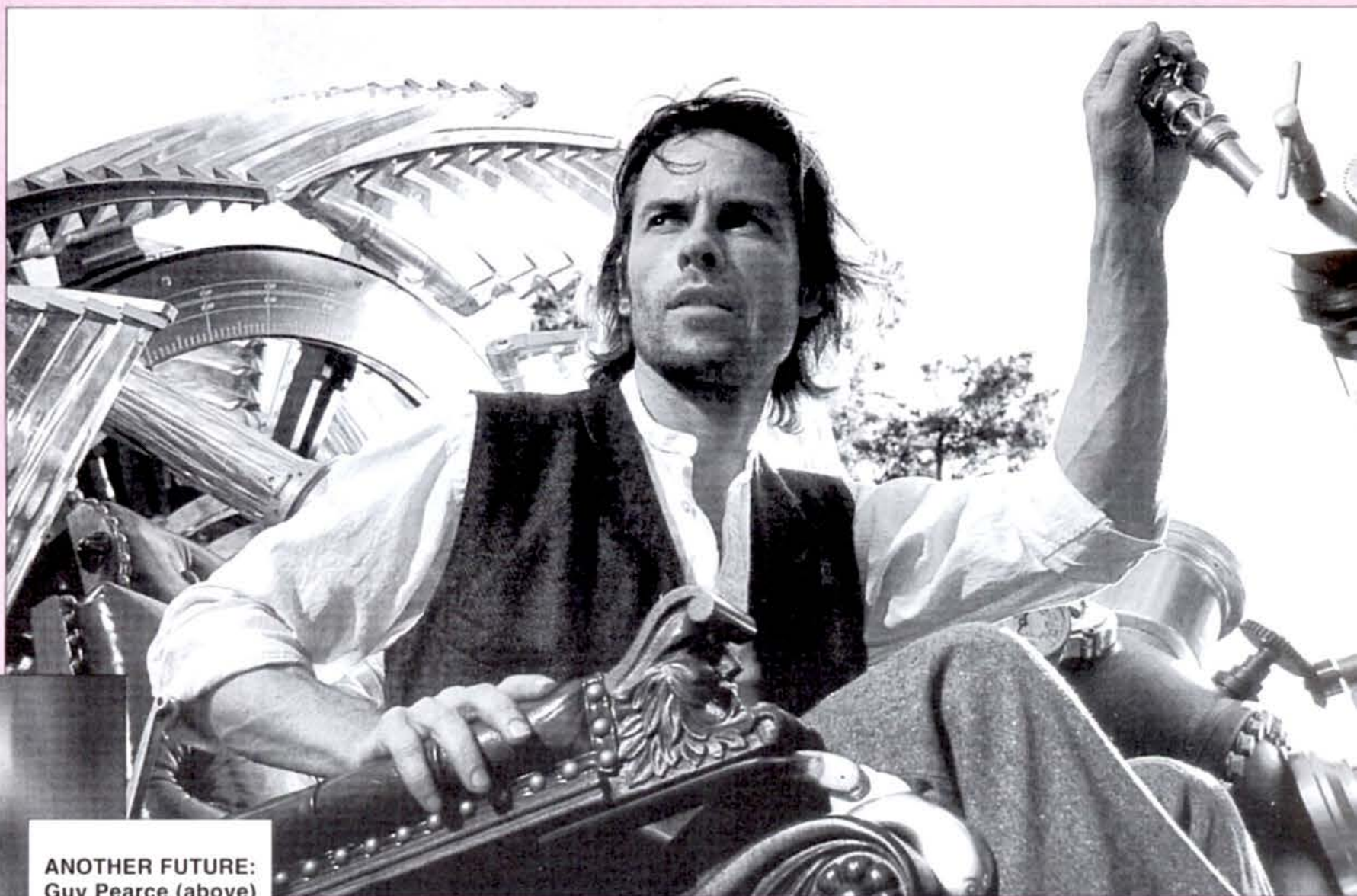
# MACHINE



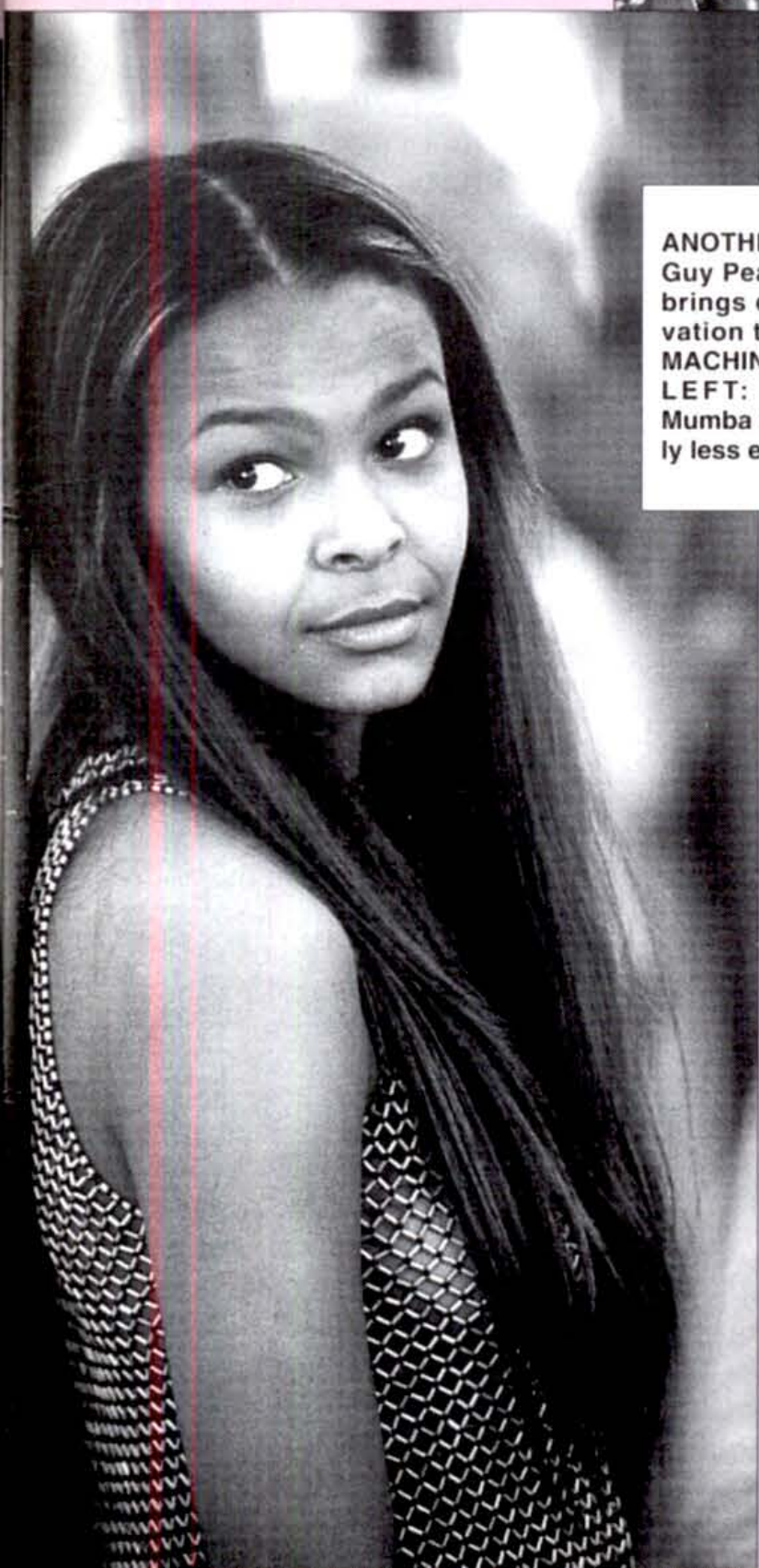
## Great-Grandson Directs a Remake

plays through the plot elements in the movie," said Wells. "So at the end of the movie there is a personal discovery, and a journey that the time traveler has gone on emotionally in himself that is as big as the sheer adventure story that we've taken the audience on."

Stepping into Rod Taylor's shoes as the time-skipping inventor is British actor Guy Pearce, who has appeared in *RAVENOUS*, *RULES OF ENGAGEMENT*, and *L.A. CONFIDENTIAL*. "Guy Pearce is an extraordinary actor—very intense, very focused on what he's doing,"



**ANOTHER FUTURE:** Guy Pearce (above) brings darker motivation to *THE TIME MACHINE*'s traveler. **LEFT:** Samantha Mumba is a decidedly less effete Eloi.



said Wells. "The great thing is that,

like Rod Taylor, he didn't condescend to the material; he played it for real and thought very carefully about the arc and progress of his character and how he is going to change through time. To me, that is the movie. He was very focused, not only on the emotional changes, but the physical changes he would have to undergo and how his character alterations would be physically expressed and manifested. The disad-

vantage would be that he would go through every line in great detail. He would think why his character was saying something and its significance. That was an exhausting process to go through but which pays off in the movie."

With the introduction of Samantha Mumba as the romantic lead, the complexion of the Weena character, as well as her name, has changed. "We really didn't like the name 'Weena,'" Wells admitted. "One of the criticisms raised against H.G. Wells are the names he gave his characters, which weren't that great. Weena is a bit of a silly name. It sounds like a hot dog, so we call her Mara instead. Sorry to the purists."

Wells had a very specific vision of the actress who would play Mara. "We were searching around for an interesting ethnic blend for our Eloi. There are a few actresses out there who

have that, but we were looking for someone who had something unusual and otherworldly about [her]," he said. Mindy Marin, casting honcho for Blue Water Ranch, called Wells and told him that that she just met Mumba, an amazing pop singer who also happened to be an amazing actress. "She's a natural," exclaimed Marin. "I've met only a half dozen people in my career that I would stake my life on being great, and she is one of them."

Wells, however, was skeptical. But he decided to look at the audition tape Marin had sent over. Impressed with the singer's extraordinary quality, Wells was still worried: Could she take direction; can she actually act?

Mumba agreed to do a screen test with Guy Pearce. "She just blew me away," said Wells, "and the way she responded emotionally to director's suggestions was amazing."



Actually, Samantha was fantastic. She really didn't have a problem getting into the whole movie-acting routine, and worked incredibly hard."

Using New York City as the central locale is another departure from the book and the film. Although not specified in the movie, the time traveler sets off on his adventure into the future in 1899. Upstate locations in Albany and Troy, New York were perfect backdrops for the turn-of-the-century architecture. Wells, noting the current ethnic blend in one of the world's largest melting pots of humanity, projected what the human race would be millennia from now. "I thought it would be more interesting to look for an ethnic blend of humanity. You think about the cultural mix that exists in New York,

It makes it more alien, unusual, and makes our time traveler more out of place. [Hartdegen] comes from a very waspy society of upper-class New York. There is nobody of color in the world he lives in. Let's take him to a world that is extremely different, is a more unusual setting."

When the time traveler arrives in the distant future, he encounters monsters: the carnivorous Morlocks who inhabit a cavernous, underground lair lit

of his Morlocks. "I did a lot of the early sketches," he said. "I worked with Crash McCready, a visualizer they have there, and I worked extensively with the guys who were doing the original plaster casts, and made their lives hell by being very precise about the anatomy and stuff like that. These are full-body prosthetics, a full costume, and the faces are full, twelve-channel radio-control, animatronic faces. The poor guys who were inside the suits were looking out

through little video cameras in their noses. It was very tough. It was hard for them to see what they were doing, and physically exhausting for them because they got very hot. We had a dozen real guys in the

suits, but you do shots where you multiply up the numbers—you get the impression that there are a hundred or so Morlocks. We have Industrial Light and Magic doing some creature-animation shots that the guys in the suits couldn't actually physically do. There are several different sets of Morlocks, but there are no other creatures. At one point we discussed having genetically mutated boars as other creatures, but they weren't feasible in budget terms."

A new character has been added to replace one of the gadgets in the previous version. Orlando Jones plays VOX, a futuristic informational hologram. "In the Pal movie, there is a scene with the spinning rings in the museum," said Wells. "In essence, VOX fulfills that kind of role, but he is much more of an interactive character. He is an interface, a library search engine, if you like, but with his own editorial style. He's a hologram. That was an interesting thing to shoot."

Jones was shot in the same scene with Guy Pearce and then the effects team from Visual Domain stepped in to create the holographic effect. "In actuality, we shot Orlando physically in the same scene with Guy

Pierce, but then we did a lot of work to make him appear that he only exists within the holographic sheet of glass. I find it rather amusing that we're going to considerable lengths to make him look like he's matted in."

Gene Warren and Tim Baar picked up Oscars for special effects in the original *TIME MACHINE* that included stop motion, time lapse, and model work. "Ours are more spectacular than the first movie, basically because technology has allowed us to do stuff that George Pal couldn't even dream of doing," said Wells. "Pal did the stop-motion stuff of seeing the seasons change. We had a shot that, while the time machine is operating, we pull back from the time machine, go out through the window of the greenhouse, fly around the outside of the greenhouse, and push back inside again. During that, we see all the plants inside the greenhouse dying off, we see plants on the outside growing as the seasons change, and we see the plants regrowing in the spring. When we come back inside, we find the laboratory has dusted-up and aged. The technology has allowed us to deliver the same kind of ideas, but take it a step further. In a more extreme case, we have a second time-travel sequence where we see geological events take place, and the time scales we're representing are large-scale, where you see rivers fall. These are things George Pal probably would have wanted to show but was restrained by his budget and technology."

In the brave new world of 802,701, mankind has devolved into the hunter and the hunted. On the bottom of that food-chain are the surface-dwelling Eloi. "We wanted to create Eloi who were more culturally interesting than the Eloi in the original movie," said Wells. "I never felt those Eloi deserved saving. They wouldn't even lift a finger to save Yvette Mimieux when she was drowning. Very early on, Oliver Scholl, our production designer, and I talked about giving some sort of evidence of the Eloi having a culture and some sort of value. You see that the Morlocks are eroding the Eloi's primitive civilization and you want to do something to help them—



tered with the bones of the hapless Eloi, the beast's primary food source. "There were three extensive sets for the Morlocks," said Wells, "but also redresses on those sets to make them into more environments. It is a deliberately chaotic, confusing world underground; very chilling and scary."

Neither the book nor the previous film credited the lumbering beasts with speech. For Pal's version, makeup wizard William

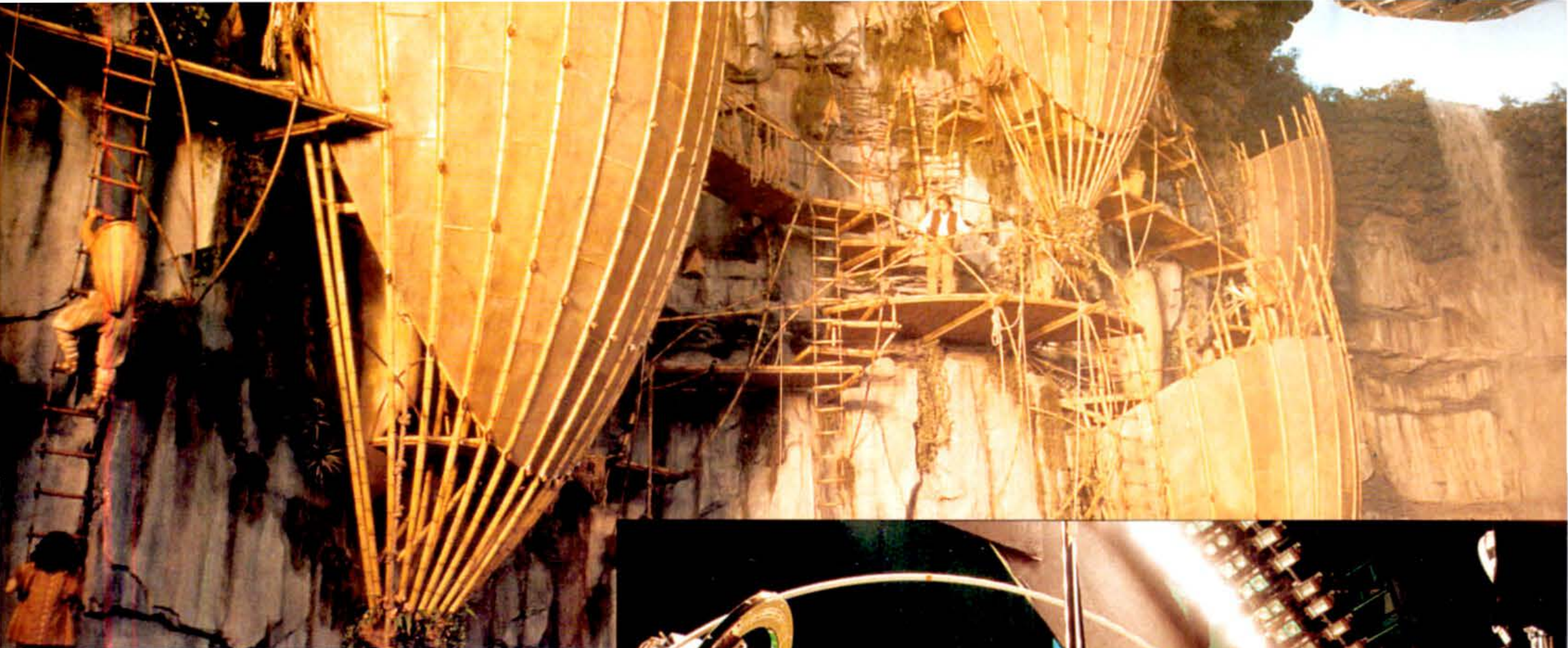
Tuttle created snaggleteethed, ape-like creatures covered in long hair. This time around, the dreaded Morlocks were the creation of Oscar-winner Stan Winston. Simon Wells was heavily involved in the design



**FERAL EXPRESSION:** Stan Winston was brought on board to realize the Morlocks. **UPPER RIGHT:** Director Simon Wells.

and the cultural blend of humanity that's going on due to our great mass-transportation systems in the world. What is going to be the result? In characterizing our Eloi, the example I used was Tiger Woods. You can't really tell what his ethnicity is. He has a great look—let's give our Eloi that kind of look.





something unexpected, something the audience hasn't seen before. You don't want to see a bunch of guys living in mud huts, so early on we searched for something that would have a style, an interest."

It actually turned out that notes turned over by Steven Spielberg set Scholl down the path to the fascinating, cliff-side dwellings he eventually designed. "Steven said stuff like, 'Shouldn't the Eloi be trying to get away from the Morlocks?,'" said Wells. "'Shouldn't they be living up as high as they can, and maybe be putting themselves in cages at night for their own protection? They're becoming animals, but they don't even realize it.' At the time we thought, *Oh, okay, thanks for the notes, Steven*, but Oliver went away and, through a process that involved a lot of beer and cigarettes, came back with just astonishing ideas for the Eloi village that are quite breathtaking when you see it for the first time. They have bamboo structures like shelves suspended on cliff faces. We built a 70-foot-high by 120-foot-long cliff on Stage 16 at Warner Bros. It was huge. It is one of the biggest sound stages in Hollywood, and we filled it. We shot one major scene forty feet up in the middle of this cliff. It had a full-sized waterfall that actually worked."

From beginning to end, the project was a major challenge for the director. So challenging in fact, that Wells missed the end of principal photography. "Initially the writing was a chal-

lenge," said Wells. "We were trying to make something bigger than just an adventure story. I don't mean that in the sense of making something bigger and more spectacular, but to make it mean something emotionally, personally, than just running around and fighting with monsters. There is a journey that the time traveler takes in a world within himself, as well as the journey he takes through time."

"It was also my first live-action movie. We went to a number of different places and a number of different environments and were met with technical challenges every stage of the way. David Valdes, our producer who worked on a lot of movies throughout the years, said that there comes a point in production where you've broken the back of it, where you're on the way downhill and then it gets easier and you just have to finish shooting the movie. But it never happened on this movie. Every time we moved to a new environment, a new set



**INDOORS AND OUT:** One of the largest stages in Hollywood housed the Eloi village (top). **RIGHT:** Filming green-screen elements.

of problems would show up. And now there are over four hundred visual-effects shots that have to be done before the December 25th release."

The hectic, eighty-day shoot took its toll on Wells. With eighteen days left on the schedule, the director collapsed. "It was total exhaustion," he recalled. "I got to a point where I literally couldn't get up and I was burning the candle at both ends. I never worked on a film that I cared so much about, and it really mattered to me that things worked out, things made sense. I also had the pressure of it being my first feature, and really wanting to perform as well as I could because Dreamworks had given me this chance. I got to a point where I literally keeled over."

Gore Verbinski (*THE MEXICAN*) was brought in to com-

plete the shooting. "He very kindly agreed to come in and shoot based on the script and design choices we'd made," said Wells. "He's very funny. I give Gore an enormous amount of credit for the things that he did creatively in the part that he shot. He said, 'No, I'm just a plumber. I'm just connecting together the choices you've already made.'"

Would the director tackle another film based on H.G. Wells's work? "I'm done," he said without hesitation. "I don't want to do another H.G. Wells story. It's amazing how many of those stories have been turned into movies and how many times they've been revisited, which is an extraordinary thing for any novelist. However, I would like to see *WAR OF THE WORLDS* done in period."

But not with Wells at the helm.

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# THE ONE

## *The Match of the Year? Jet Li vs. Jet Li*

By Craig Reid

Situated atop a forty-foot-high, rickety-looking catwalk, Hong Kong action hero Jet Li looked like a puppet on a string as he prepared for one of Corey Yuen's patented wire gags. As Yuen belted, "Action," a menagerie of Chinese stuntguys yanked on the wires by leaping off ten-foot-high ladders or running back and forth in a controlled chaos of tug-of-war precision. Jet and his opponent flew upwards and sixty feet back in opposite directions. Then, as if being struck by invisible tennis rackets, they speedily flew back towards each other for a final clash of pugilistic mayhem.

Jet's opponent? Jet.

The brainchild of the outrageous X-FILES writing team of Glen Morgan (producer and co-writer) and James Wong (director, producer, and co-writer), THE ONE was originally slated to star pseudo-hero The Rock (who wound up even more "pseudo" as the CGI Scorpion King in THE MUMMY RETURNS), but when the

WWF's Vince McMahon refused to let him go, the film's action took on a more mythical dimension with the casting of Li.

Morgan outlined the project's evolution, which started at a sporting event: "It was at the Dodger home opener last year," he said, laughing. "Our agent, who also represents The Rock, said we ought to do a film with him. We're like, 'Nah.' But for whatever reason, we checked him out. The idea was we wanted The Rock to fight himself, and wrote the story backwards, creating this parallel universe concept. Took us five weeks to write—we turned it in on Friday, got it green-lit on Tuesday, but then McMahon wouldn't let Rock do it.

"Revolution Studios said, 'We love the film,' flew to Paris to meet Jet (then filming Luc Besson's KISS OF THE DRAGON),

worthy opponent for Jet is Jet himself."

According to Morgan, there's a theory that holds that an infinite number of parallel universes exist, with some just a few millimeters away, reachable by cross-dimensional bridges. In THE ONE, these universes have joined a sort of United Nations Plus called the Multi-Verse. Because some members have learned how to travel between universes, the Multi-Verse has established a police force to monitor and quash anyone who has ambitions of becoming a million-fold Hitler.

Jet plays two characters: Gabe Law (good Jet), and Yu Law (bad Jet). Yu is a Multi-Verse agent who, while defending himself during a mission, accidentally kills himself and HIGHLANDER-ishly discovers that he can absorb his dead self's energy. Added Morgan, "Gabe, an L.A. sheriff, is the last Law alive. Working with agents, played by Delroy Lindo and Jason Statham, they must stop Yu, who is very powerful, from killing [the other] 123 Laws."

How did the script change when Jet got involved? "Jet brings a whole different sensibility, the philosophy he embodies," said Wong. "Rock is out there, over the top, and hasn't proven himself as a hero, while Jet is anything but that. Rock could never do this kind of action. Law is a character who looks Asian [and] spiritually embodies things that are Asian, yet his wife, T.K. (played by Carla Gugino—SPY KIDS, MERMAID CHRONICLES: SHE-CREATURE) is Caucasian, like [my wife]. It's important to me to show we're not making anything out of that. It's more about acceptance of interracial romance



**INSPIRED REPLACEMENT:** When Jet Li took The Rock's place in THE ONE, the stunts got a lot more energetic (left). **ABOVE:** Co-star Carla Gugino.

and came back the following Monday, saying they had Jet. It's the same film, but now we have different fights and action. It makes sense that the only

actress who looks Asian [and] spiritually embodies things that are Asian, yet his wife, T.K. (played by Carla Gugino—SPY KIDS, MERMAID CHRONICLES: SHE-CREATURE) is Caucasian, like [my wife]. It's important to me to show we're not making anything out of that. It's more about acceptance of interracial romance





and marriage. It's part of my life. The more you mix races, the more the world will get along better."

According to Morgan, the film's toughest scene was being shot on the day of our visit: an epic battle between Jet and Jet where the special effects required for multi-universe combatants would be keenly mixed with multi-phasic speeds and CG face-swapping. As if on cue, FX Supervisor Eric Durst (*BATMAN AND ROBIN*, *END OF DAYS*) strolled by. "Big challenge," he blurted. "In some films when an actor plays two characters and interacts with himself, they never touch each other, but in *THE ONE*, they not only make contact throughout elaborate fight scenes, but they're filmed at different speeds. We're also developing a CGI technique to place Jet's face on another body, so we can freely photograph Jet's stunt double and integrate Jet's face onto that double's body. This way we have scenes of Jet attacking himself, rather than having him continually changing makeup and costumes and fighting air, then using splitscreen where there's a perceptible line between them."

When we asked Jet Li why he decided to do *THE ONE*, he gleefully responded in very deliberate and improved English, "I am The One!" He laughed. "Sorry, just joking. Seriously, the script and ideas are very cool, and I always wanted to do sci-fi film. I like that there are many universes and each has your life in it. So many 'you.' When I first saw the script, it was a typical American action/sci-fi, but after they pick me up, I say, 'Wait a minute. I like the idea, but we need to do something about the martial arts.' So we get Robert Kamen [*KARATE KID*] to re-write my two characters, because he knows martial arts and philosophy."

"So for each character, we develop a philosophy: bad Jet only kills 'himself'—why not other people? He uses a martial art called 'Hsing Yi,' an attack idea of shortest distance between two points. He just kills to reach his goal. Good Jet is trying to keep his family and normal life and doesn't want to become a hero or be The One. His philosophy is like a circle, like 'Ba Gua' [a martial art based on circular paths and hand movements] and yin-yang and looking for balance. His family is enough for him, but now he must protect them and his normal life. The 'two' are a balance unto each other: good/bad, happy/unhappy. It's like, if everyone in the world is American, the world wouldn't work [laughs]. If all Chinese—not work. We need different culture, religion, people, to create a balanced world."

**BESIDE HIMSELF:** Li plays an ordinary man who has to fight his evil self across the dimensions.



"But the most interesting part is Jet fights Jet, and the CGI they do to make that work. That has been tough because, usually, I play the good guy—and once the bad guy—and then fight with [another] actor. Now I fight a double, or me, and must work double-harder [laughs]—learn both sides of all action, movements; how to bring out their different personalities, philosophies, fighting abilities, and forms. The bad me is very powerful and has more 'ching gong' abilities [a martial art technique where practitioners can jump high, walk on tree-tops, etc.], like in ancient Chinese period-piece films where they can fly."

**Sick the Ripper crimes. BELOW:** Johnny Depp as a detective with a psychic link to the murders.



ogy, appears in *FROM HELL* as the laudanum-addicted Sir William Gull. A further veteran British thespian is Ian Richardson, no stranger himself to Victoriana, having played Sherlock Holmes in TV versions of *HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES* and *SIGN OF FOUR*, before appearing as the detective's real-life model Doctor Bell in the ex-

Western audiences, it's new.

Why, then, did Li turn down an opportunity to work on *THE MATRIX*? "The Wachowski brothers know how to shoot Chinese martial arts. They don't need me, and there is no reason to get us all in that film. [Li was referring to himself, Michelle Yeoh, and Cheng Pei-pei, the villain Jade Fox from *CROUCHING TIGER*.] It means for over one year of work we have no other time for other projects, except one."

"Although I enjoyed the *MATRIX*, the martial arts was nothing new. What's great about Hong Kong film is we know that some poor stuntguy is doing that really unsafe, life-threatening stunt. In *MATRIX*, it's CGI characters or someone against a green screen doing that stunt. In *MATRIX 2*, this line will be further blurred when Keanu Reeves's face can be put onto a different body doing the action or martial arts. So if Jet or Yeoh were in that film, we not only would start to doubt that they are really doing their own stuff, but [we wouldn't even] know that it's really them, or if a different character's face was put onto their body."

Jet philosophically closed, "People's lives are like film: you play your character in real life, and film puts your whole life in a short time. Each film has a different story and life—you become that person for a few months, and after that you become another person. In real life, you learn to love, deal with people, learn different language and culture. In film, you learn things you may never do—be a cop or ancient hero—but they all have a part in your life. Together it makes you grow as one."

CFQ



# FROM HELL

## *Jack the Ripper Becomes a Menace II Great Britain in the Hughes Bros. Film*

by Andrew Osmond

**L**ondon, 1888. Welcome to Whitechapel, a district shrouded in fog and shadow. There are knives in the dark, blood in the alleys; Victorian values are undercut by ghastly killings and grisly mutilations. In the midst of it all, one mocking signature: Yours truly, Jack the Ripper.

The unsolved murders in London's East End have become one of the most enduring of modern myths, a scandal and mystery that's survived a century of far greater horror. There have been countless "Ripper" films made for cinema and TV, as well as an industry of books entwining sober history and wild speculation. In his original graphic novel, *From Hell*, writer Alan Moore (*Watchmen*, *V for Vendetta*) concluded that "the reality [of the events] is dwarfed by the

vast theme park we've built around it. Truth is, this has never been about the murders, not the killer nor his victims. It's about us; about our minds and how they dance."

For Allen Hughes, co-director of *FROM HELL*, the film version, the catalyst was a TV show and a host from Vulcan. "What first turned me and my brother [Albert Hughes] onto the Jack the Ripper legend was an episode of the *IN SEARCH OF* series, presented by Leonard Nimoy. It really spooked us. After that, we were hooked. We watched TV shows, documentaries, and explored all the different theories about who the Ripper might have been."

The subject matter might surprise fans of the sibling directors. The Hughes brothers made their name with a trio of gritty depictions of American urban life: *MENACE II SOCIETY* (1993), *DEAD PRESIDENTS* (1995), and

the documentary *AMERICAN PIMP* (1999). Why move from these contemporary subjects to Victorian London? "It's a fascinating, challenging time," said Hughes. "It was intensely stimulating to us. We learned about class culture—not just the underclass that the Ripper's victims belonged to, but about all classes, about a completely different way of life. The class issue fascinates us—how Victorian society put people in their place, how it expected them to live their lives, and how it dealt with 'undesirables.' The Ripper's victims are the most documented lower-class people of their time, in terms of how they lived and worked."

For producer Don Murphy, *FROM HELL* is not a great departure from the brothers' past work. "When you get down to the core, *FROM HELL* is a 'street movie,' like the films they've made before. The Hughes brothers have a modern-day sensibility and style, and their creative approach was

to take a story that was weathered, to say the least, and give it a modern spin, relate it to modern-day society." Murphy points to the opening of the film, an extended tracking shot in the best Hollywood traditions, designed to lead today's audience into Victorian London. "We start above the roof-tops, then descend to street-level so you see the buildings, the poverty and squalid conditions of the common people—bringing you into the film's world—and finally introducing you to Mary Kelly."

Kelly, played by Heather Graham (*TWIN PEAKS*, *BOOGIE NIGHTS*, *AUSTIN POWERS: THE SPY WHO SHAGGED ME*), is one of *FROM HELL*'s two main protagonists. Hughes described her as a victim of circumstance: "She came over from Ireland as a child, and is just trying to make her way through life, resorting

**DOWN WITH THE COBBLESTONES:** The Hughes brothers (left) prep John-  
for a shot.





to prostitution in the East End. We wanted to make her true to the historic Mary Kelly, and quite close to the character in the *From Hell* graphic novel." The other main character is Inspector Abberline, the equally real policeman investigating the Ripper murders, played by Johnny Depp (DONNIE BRASCO, FEAR AND LOATHING IN LAS VEGAS, and the archetypal Tim Burton outsider in EDWARD SCISSORHANDS, ED WOOD, and SLEEPY HOLLOW). The film proposes a friendship between Abberline and Kelly, a bright element in a generally grim story. As Murphy pointed out, "It's a Hollywood film. There have to be moments of light and happiness, and it must make you care about the main characters."

Not that there's much happiness for Abberline at the start of the film. "We first meet him in an opium den, mourning the loss of his wife and child," said Hughes. "He's completely broken; nothing matters to him. Then when the Ripper murders start, clues 'come to him' about the murderer, in opium visions. The story weaves in and out of these visions." Murphy added that FROM HELL "doesn't necessarily make you buy into the theory that these visions are 'true.' But today's audiences are familiar with the idea of drug-induced visions, and can understand that part of Victorian life." The film in fact departs from Moore's vision by conflating the historic Abberline with Robert Lees, a self-proclaimed psychic involved in the Ripper case.

"Abberline bonds with Kelly, tries to save her," said Hughes. "The film is evenly handled between Abberline on the one side and Mary Kelly and her friends targeted by the Ripper on the other."

Giving away much more about the characters would involve spoilers, but by a strange coincidence the cast includes two British actors who have signed up for major fantasy franchises: Robbie Coltrane, who will soon be seen as genial giant Hagrid in HARRY POTTER, here plays one Peter Godley; while veteran actor Ian Holm, who plays hobbit Bilbo Baggins in THE LORD OF THE RINGS tril-



**WHERE'S FOX MULDER WHEN YOU NEED HIM?:** Urban legend meets conspiracy theory in Alan Moore's elaborate retelling of the Jack the Ripper crimes. **BELOW:** Johnny Depp as a detective with a psychic link to the murders.



ogy, appears in FROM HELL as the laudanum-addicted Sir William Gull. A further veteran British thespian is Ian Richardson, no stranger himself to Victoriana, having played Sherlock Holmes in TV versions of HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES and SIGN OF FOUR, before appearing as the detective's real-life model Doctor Bell in the ex-

cellent miniseries MURDER ROOMS. Richardson plays Sir Charles Warren, Abberline's police superior.

Any treatment of Jack the Ripper raises the question of violence, and ugly violence at that. The *From Hell* graphic novel was brutally explicit, enough to lead to a ban in Australia. "We're not nearly as graphic as that," said Hughes. "The Fox studio was very worried about the level of violence in the film, but we wanted to be more suggestive." The directors watched a range of Hitchcock classics, including the Ripper-inspired silent film THE LODGER (1926), SABOTAGE (1936), and his later serial-killer film, FRENZY (1972). "We thought the low-key approach was a more interest-

continued on page 21



# FROM HELL

## Other Films

### Everyone from H.G. Wells to Sherlock Holmes Has Taken a Crack at the Ripper Crimes

By Andrew Osmond

Part of the Ripper's appeal, especially to horror-film makers, is pretty self-evident. Consider the opening of the 1966 film, *A STUDY IN TERROR*, in which Jack is pursued by Sherlock Holmes, played by John Neville. As usual in a Ripper film, it opens on a dark London street. We see a close-up of a woman's boots, bright scarlet, as their owner searches for business. An unseen man approaches. The camera pans up the form of the prostitute (revealing her impressive bust) and closes in on her photogenic face as she smiles seductively. "Hello darling, like a bit of fun?" Then the knife...the scream...the cut throat...and the overwrought "horror" music bubbling up as the titles roll.

If this all sounds familiar, it should. The same mixture of "bad girl" titillation and violence is used in countless horror films, most blatantly *FRIDAY THE 13TH* and its fellow slasher-teen pics. As *From Hell* author Alan Moore points out, this is murder played for kicks, the meeting-point between horror and pornography.

It's no surprise that the Ripper is often portrayed as openly supernatural, something more than human or perhaps, not human at all. A prime example is the 1943 story, "Yours Truly Jack the Ripper," by *Psycho* author Robert Bloch, which first appeared in *Weird Tales* magazine and was reprinted in numerous anthologies. Bloch's story came to the screen in 1961 as part of the *THRILLER* anthology TV show presented by Boris Karloff. The idea was also borrowed for the first episode of the short-lived *KOLCHAK: THE NIGHT STALKER* TV series in 1974. A variant figures in the TV film,



DEATH AND POLITICS: FROM HELL is not the first film to posit a dark conspiracy behind Jack the Ripper.

*BRIDGE ACROSS TIME* (1988), in which David Hasselhoff—yes, *that* David Hasselhoff!—is on hand to track him down.

A more original "return of the Ripper" story was attempted in *HANDS OF THE RIPPER* (1971), made by Britain's Hammer studio and directed by Peter Sasdy. *HANDS* concentrates on the killer's traumatized daughter (movingly played by Angharad Rees) who finds herself driven to kill, either by her father's spirit or by a mix of horrific memories and Freudian neuroses. The film came out the same year as another Hammer entry, *DOCTOR JEKYLL AND SISTER HYDE*, in which the transformed "sister" (played by Martine Beswick, against Ralph Bates as Jekyll) commits the Ripper murders to collect female hormones for an elixir of life.

*DOCTOR JEKYLL AND SISTER HYDE* is one of several works taking the line that, since the Ripper is a mythic character, why not link him with mythic contemporaries? Another is not a film but a novel, Kim Newman's excellent *Anno Dracula* (1992), which cries out for adaptation as a big-budget miniseries. Newman presents a parallel universe in which Doctor Seward—Van

Helsing's ally in the original *Dracula*—

takes to murdering a familiar group of vampirized prostitutes. Although Seward acts alone, it turns out his deeds are being manipulated by the high-powered Diogenes Club—a body familiar to Sherlock Holmes fans—for a strike against the vampire monarchy.

This is, of course, a twist on the conspiracy theories that sprung up around Jack over the decades, many of which are summarized at the end of the *From Hell* novel. The most famous of these theories was presented in *Jack the Ripper: The Final Solution* (1976) by Stephen Knight. The book has inspired several works, including the 1988 TV miniseries, *JACK THE RIPPER*, and the Sherlock Holmes-based *MURDER BY DECREE* (1979).

Meanwhile, the inventive Robert Bloch, having brought the Ripper to Chicago, also suggested a way to take the killer to new frontiers and the twenty-third century. The Bloch-scripted *STAR TREK* episode, "Wolf in the Fold," is set on the planet Argelius II, where Scottie becomes the universe's least likely serial-killer suspect. The true culprit turns out to be Jack the Ripper, exposed as

a disembodied, fear-eating energy-life form. Other space-age Rippers turned up on *BABYLON 5* and in the serialized *DOCTOR WHO* story, "The Talons of Weng-Chiang."

A more ambitious work is *TIME AFTER TIME* (1979), directed by Nicholas Meyer. In this film, the Ripper is revealed to be the respectable Doctor Stevenson—a nod to Mr. Hyde?—excellently played by David Warner. He steals a time machine invented by his former friend H. G. Wells (Malcolm McDowell), and flees to present-day San Francisco. Wells follows in hot

pursuit. In the film's best scene, Warner turns on a TV and gives McDowell a channel-hopping tour of the carnage of the twentieth century. As Warner dryly observes, in his own time he was a freak; in 1979, he's an amateur.

The Ripper's place in history, and the twentieth century, is the central theme of the *From Hell* novel. As the killer's madness deepens, he becomes increasingly unstuck in time. In one frame, his atrocities are observed by a gallery of twentieth-century British killers; finally, he apparently travels into present-day London, only to be terrified by what he sees. "You are the sum of all preceding, yet seem indifferent to yourselves," he tells the twentieth-century ghosts. "How would I seem to you? Some antique fiend or penny-dreadful horror, yet you frighten me!"

The point is not that the present is any crueller than the past, but that it no longer scares us. Our perceptions of the world have changed, and even the Ripper, for all his pop-culture presence, has become no more than an "antique fiend." *From Hell* suggests that may be the most terrifying thing of all.

CFO



ing, challenging way to do it. We show one incision on screen, but it's far less grotesque than the graphic novel."

Don Murphy warned, though, that the film is still a "dark, dark thriller, a SILENCE OF THE LAMBS-type experience. For some reason, I seem to be involved with a lot of dark films: NATURAL BORN KILLERS, APT PUPIL..."

London is notorious for being "Hollywoodized" by U.S. cinema, reduced to montages of Tower Bridge and Big Ben fading into a sea of bowler hats. "I think some viewers will wish we had gone that way!" said Murphy. "We strove for one-hundred-percent accuracy. FROM HELL depicts a harsh, often horrible place, indicative of a society where you had either way too much money or nothing at all." The London sets were recreated on the outskirts of Prague, with additional filming in London's Pinewood studios. In their search for authenticity, the directors visited present-day Whitechapel, and went on an intensive study-course, researching an area at a time. "The Whitechapel of 1888 doesn't exist any

tioned historians about the area. "We asked who lived down such-and-such a street in 1888, and what kind of people they were. We also wanted to know how many bobbies [policemen] were on the beat in an area, and who would be outdoors at a given time of the day and night."

Murphy stressed, however, that the film doesn't pretend to give the "true" story. "We had a 'Ripperologist' on the team, Stewart Evans [who co-edited the *Ultimate Jack the Ripper Companion* and co-wrote *Jack the Ripper: First American Serial Killer*,



**A GENTLER RENDITION:** Heather Graham may not be historically accurate as street-walker Mary Kelly, but she's a lot easier to look at. **LEFT:** Graham and Depp in a grim evocation of Britain at the end of the nineteenth century.



more, except for small pieces," said Hughes.

In their travels, the directors visited such surviving sites as Christ Church, Spitalfields (a famous Whitechapel church and a key location in the graphic novel), as well as the Ten Bells pub, frequented by the Ripper's prey. "We looked at drinking fountains, the cobbles in the streets, in order to recreate the sites for the film. We focused especially on the details of each murder site." The directors aimed for a level of detail beyond previous Ripper films. "We tried to be meticulous in getting the layout of the area right. That meant reading between the lines of documents, as many contemporary pictures only show part of a scene. It was a lot of detective work."

As well as walking around and taking photographs, the Hughes brothers ques-

which explores yet another theory], who is very clear that we don't know who the Ripper was, and we'll never know. It's over a hundred years ago, and there may be people who don't want us to know."

Yet Murphy believes the time is ripe for another Ripper film. "These things go in cycles. In America, the Ripper has dropped out of sight over the past ten or fifteen years. Only the broad outlines are known to the audience." Beyond the sensational murders, though, did Murphy hope the film would inspire younger viewers to explore past times, and perhaps encourage them to question things today? "If they do, that would be good. But I believe the saying, 'If you want to send a message, call Western Union.' As I said before, this is a Hollywood film."

And not, Hughes and Murphy are anxious to stress, a graphic novel. The origi-

nal *From Hell* was a densely-written, exhaustively-annotated epic, running to over five hundred pages. "It has lots of elements from the comic," said Hughes, "but fans expecting a straight adaptation will be disappointed. This is a two-hour film, and we have to compress the details to produce a work that delivers on its own terms." One obvious change: Whereas the graphic novel delivers its "answer" to the Ripper puzzle early on, the film is structured as a mystery story, with both viewers and Abberline equally in the dark. Some scenes presented openly in the comic are only hinted at here, especially those relating to the Victorian hierarchy.

The end was also a challenge. "The studio just wanted a traditional, Hollywood-type happy ending," said Hughes. "But our ending is more vague and ambivalent, closer to the graphic novel."

In all, Murphy concluded, "I think you'll actually be surprised how close the film is to the comic." He warned, though, "If everyone who read the *From Hell* comic and everyone who was interested in Jack the Ripper saw our movie ten times, it would be a huge flop. It has to appeal to a much wider audience than that." **CFQ**



# FROM HELL

## The Graphic Novel

### Social Observation Meets Vivid Horror in the Moore Original

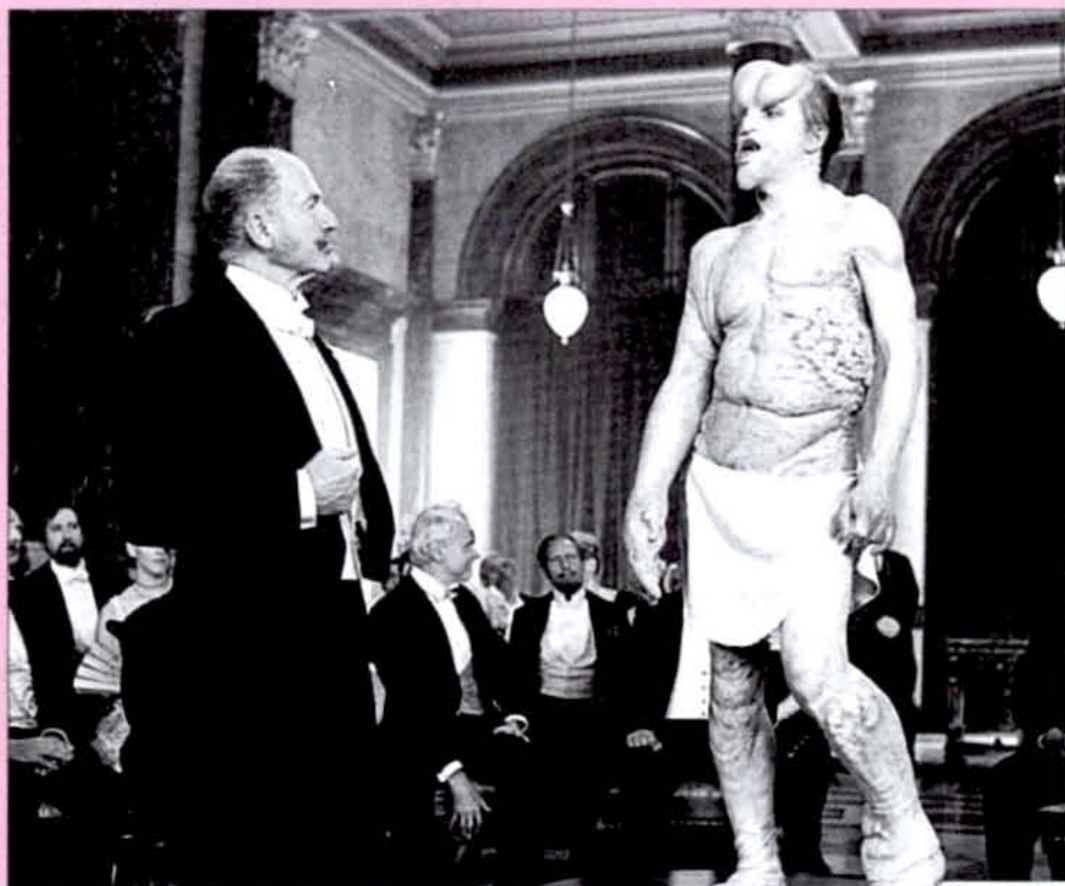
by Andrew Osmond

The *From Hell* graphic novel is about much more than Jack the Ripper. It's a novel about the 1880's and how this turbulent decade shaped the twentieth century. It's about the class system, from prostitutes through to royalty. It's about London and its architects, and reason and dreams, and art and violence. And it has a suitably impressive guest-cast to support its themes. The walk-ons include John Merrick (the "Elephant Man"), William Morris, Oscar Wilde, William Blake, and even young diabolist Aleister Crowley, to name but a few.

*From Hell* was written by Alan Moore and drawn by Eddie Campbell, both titans of the comics medium. Alan Moore came to fame in the '80s with *V for Vendetta*, and deconstructed superheroes in his classic *Watchmen*. He is now engaged in the herculean task of writing DC's *America's Best Comics*. (The five distinct comics are *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, *Top 10*, *Tom Strong*, *Promethea*, and the anthology *Tomorrow Stories*.) Artist Eddie Campbell is best-known for *Bacchus*, about mythic deities coping with the twentieth century, and the *Alec* books, a personal overview of the comics medium and its practitioners.

It's a sign of *From Hell*'s long gestation that Moore conceived it as a response to Margaret Thatcher, then British Prime Minister. "One of the main incentives for *From Hell* was a directive from Mrs. Thatcher to return to Victorian values," Moore said. "I thought it would be interesting to analyse what those values actually were."

The novel is subtitled "A melodrama in sixteen parts." Why melodrama? According to Moore, "When I first used the phrase, back when I started the project, I just wanted a subtitle with a Victorian feeling. But when I looked into the origins of the word, I found the first melodramas were actually plays in the nineteenth century, which re-created famous murders. [The format was still popular in such early silent films as *THE MURDER IN THE RED BARN* (1902)]. The plays often lent an air of verisimilitude by employing props from the actual event. For example: A melodrama might use a table from a public house where a crime



happened. So there was a fair degree of accuracy, combined with lots of fictionalized and lurid detail. I thought the word 'melodrama' fitted *From Hell* quite well."

Not that Moore was interested in a generic Ripper yarn, particularly when it came to the victims. "We took care not to present the women as anonymous Ripper-fodder, nor to present their fates in a way that was 'staged,' exciting, and therefore pornographic," Moore said. The book also presents the Ripper's philosophy—however twisted—behind the crimes. "We give the Ripper a long speech in Chapter Four. True, it's delivered by a killer and misogynist in an adversarial way, but at the same time, it foregrounds the treatment of women by men through the ages. I'm not sure *From Hell* is predominantly feminist, but it's sympathetic to the female characters."

Moore has a habit of letting his most disturbing characters speak eloquently for themselves. "I think it goes back to the beginning of my comics career, to *V for Vendetta*, which was set in a fascist Britain. My first urge in *V* was to create a group of Nazi caricatures, but it became obvious that wouldn't be real—not all extreme right-wingers think the same way or have the same reasons or motives. I ended up going out of my way to make the hero's actions questionable, and the villain's sympathetic and understandable. I feel a certain obliga-

tion to each character I create, even the monsters. I want to allow them what shreds of dignity they'd possess, rather than create a Manichean comic-book world of good and evil."

Moore even brings the Ripper into the present-day, in a scene where the killer comments on "our" society. "What he sees in our world," said Moore, "is an absence of 'affect,' of emotional response. Serial killers are often identified by their lack of affect, the fact that they aren't affected in normal ways by their environment. In a media-saturated age, where we're shown new horrors on the news every day, that has a similar result."

**LIVING MYTHS:** John Merrick, "The Elephant Man," symbolically figures in both Alan Moore's graphic novel (right) and the Hughes brothers' film (above).



We're supposedly well-informed about the world and our fellow man; we don't have the Victorians' excuse of ignorance. We're bludgeoned by facts; we no longer respond to the information we're given. The result is a psychopathic society, which is a fair point for an 'affectless' serial killer to make."

Inevitably, *From Hell* received more attention for its violence than its philosophy. "From Hell was seized in South Africa, America, England.... We notched up an impressive list!" Moore remembered. The best-known controversy was in Campbell's home country, Australia, where there were two incidents. "The first seizure was while *From Hell* was still being serialized," Moore said. "The strip was given to an ombudsman, who decided it was clearly not meant for children and let it pass." The second incident was more serious: In March 2000, after the strip was completed, a back-issue of the Kitchen Sink edition was seized by Perth customs. The issue contained the notorious Chapter Ten, thirty pages detailing the Ripper's most hideous crime. It's perhaps the most harrowing sequence ever



presented in comic form, and led to the whole strip being banned in Australia.

Did Campbell himself have any qualms about drawing the sequence? "When I started in on the book, knowing full well where it was leading, I felt apprehensive. But strangely, by the time we got to the violent chapter, I had become desensitized to the nastiness, as the moral watchdogs of our society would say. The blood had become just a lot of ink." Of course, the fact that Australian Customs saw the segment in isolation made all the difference. As Moore said, "Out of context, the episode does indeed amount to dozens of pages of someone cutting a woman to pieces." In the end, the ban was lifted by Australia's Office of Film and Literature Classifications, which saw the whole book. Moore suggests the turnaround was related to *From Hell*'s artist living in Australia. "Australians are desperate for big-time cultural objects that could be seen as originating from their country."

Many of the events and characterizations in *From Hell* are imaginary, or at least go far past the historic evidence. Neither Moore nor Campbell believe the theory presented in *From Hell*. As Campbell put it, "We were creating a fiction rather than trying to solve a crime."

Nonetheless, the amount of historic research in the book is extraordinary. Campbell's main sources were "books of photos of Victorian London, of which quite a few have been in print in recent years. I also used old bound copies of contemporary journals, such as the *Illustrated London News* and *Punch*. There is a very good reference library here in Brisbane."

Campbell's black-and-white drawings in *From Hell* have been variously described as "grim," "scratchy," and "artfully ugly"—cons removed from what most people think of as "comic art." How would Campbell describe his style? "I try to make the style appropriate for each sequence. In Chapter



**DON'T GO THERE:** The graphic enactment of the Ripper crimes depicted in *From Hell*'s infamous Chapter Ten (above) was modulated to meet the mass-audience demands of the film version...but not by much (below).

Five, for example, I rendered high life in London's West End in soft half tones, to contrast with the brittle harsh-

ness in the ink lines of the poorer environment in the East End." Campbell cites the pen styles of Victorian artists Charles Dana Gibson and Phil May as influences, along with earlier wood engravings, where an artist drew a picture on a wood block to be hand-carved by engravers. "It's a bit like pencillers and inkers in modern comics. It goes without saying a clumsy engraver can ruin a fine drawing."

*From Hell* was a case of a tale growing massively in the telling. Originally planned as sixteen, eight-page chapters, it ended up four times as long. As Moore explained, "It was an unusual comic to write, and a contrast to *Watchmen*, which was very strictly structured. When I conceived *From Hell*, I knew the Ripper story and the way I wanted to tell it, in sixteen parts. But I

deliberately left the length of the chapters open, which in retrospect was a good idea. As the strip continued, new information emerged and new subjects became relevant. Our flexible structure meant we had the liberty to let the story grow and develop."

Campbell added, "Alan decided at the beginning to use no captions in *From Hell*, which meant everything had to be spelled out visually.... Our way involved Alan working to a great extent behind the scenes, where much of his word play was invisible. That's why Steve Bissette (editor/publisher of *Taboo* magazine) thought publishing Alan's scripts in book form was a good idea. It's a shame that wasn't continued." Was Campbell perturbed by the way the strip quadrupled? "No way—I was getting paid by the page. The length suited me fine!"

The *From Hell* novel has enjoyed a great deal of mainstream attention, overwhelmingly favorable. Campbell is optimistic about what this said about the comics medium. "What we find at the moment is a trend in mainstream media towards taking the graphic novel seriously again. There've been an extraordinary number of excellent graphic novels in recent years. I'm glad to say *From Hell* is regarded as part of this development."

Moore is satisfied by what he achieved. "I'm not sure we would do another comic like *From Hell*, given it took so long, but I'm happy we covered the subject exhaustively. It's not as if we'll realize there was something huge we forgot to put in!" **CFQ**





## By Andrew Osmond

*Once upon a time, there was a house. The house's address was Number Four Privet Drive, somewhere in southern England. Its owners were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much. But for the children reading the story, Number Four Privet Drive was to become an address as special as Bag End, or Toad Hall, or the second star on the right and straight on 'til morning. Because Number Four Privet Drive is where the magic starts. Number Four Privet Drive is the home of Harry Potter.*

All children, and anyone who's been a child, relate to the Harry story," said Chris Columbus, director of *HARRY POTTER AND THE SORCERER'S STONE*, or *PHILOSOPHER'S STONE*, as the film will be called in England. Based on the phenomenally popular book by Joanne Kathleen Rowling (pronounced "rolling"), the story tells of a lonely orphan boy, cruelly treated by his odious relatives, who has his life changed by a letter which reads "We are pleased to inform you that you have a place at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry."

Columbus believes this is every child's dream. "Everyone who reads *Harry* wonders, *What if I got that invitation to Hogwarts?* I know some kids really believe that when they turn eleven, the letter will come, which is an amazing tribute to the power of the books. *HARRY* is about finding your identity, conquering your fears, and the hope of being pulled out of your dreary life."

As all *Harry* fans know, Hogwarts is a fantastic castle, perched on a mountaintop beside a great lake and a haunted forest. It's a place where paintings talk and ghosts walk, and where the school sport is Quidditch, a manic ball game played on flying broomsticks. Among his classmates, Harry (played by Daniel Radcliffe, who previously appeared in the Pierce Brosnan thriller *THE TAILOR OF PANAMA* and a BBC version of *DAVID COPPERFIELD*) meets his two best friends, shambolic Ron (newcomer Rupert Grint) and bossy Hermione (Emma Watson, another newcomer). Another of Potter's closest friends is the massive and hairy Hagrid, a genial giant with a heart of gold and a soft spot for sometimes-lethal pets. He's played by Robbie Coltrane, whose roles range from such comedies as *NUNS ON THE RUN* to the dark drama of *CRACKER* and *FROM HELL*.

Don't be fooled into thinking everyone at Hogwarts is nice, though. There's the terrifying potions teacher Professor Snape (Alan Rickman), who seems to have a personal grudge against Harry. The bullying schoolboy Draco Malfoy (Tom Felton) is no fun either. And there's the small matter of a rogue troll, an obnoxious poltergeist,

and something very nasty on the third floor. But all these pale beside the one character whose very name terrifies Hogwarts: the rogue wizard Voldemort, an evil tyrant from years past. And Harry, who bears a strange, lightning-shaped scar on his forehead, comes to learn he has a special reason to beware Voldemort. So the adventure begins.

Columbus's own output ranges from writing duties on *GREMLINS* and *YOUNG SHERLOCK HOLMES* to directing family comedy hits such as the *HOME ALONE* films and *MRS. DOUBTFIRE*. He's effusively enthusiastic about *HARRY POTTER*, in both book and screen forms. "I believe every scene in *HARRY POTTER* has some magic. In the film, it's not just about the performances of the actors on screen; it's the richness of Rowling's storytelling, which is charming and very visual. It's very easy for a child to picture what's happening in a *Harry Potter* book, and that sparks a child's imagination. Some scenes in the book are obviously not in the film, but it follows the structure closely, and every major sequence is intact. I see the film as a companion piece to the book, not in any sense superseding it—it's an incredibly faithful adaptation. My hope is people who know the book will see the film and say, 'Yes, that's how I imagined it.' And I hope it will encourage people who don't know the book to read it."

Not that Columbus thought he would get the job at first. "My daughter Eleanor convinced me to read the first book. I read it for pleasure, not with any film in mind. I finished and thought, *I've got to make it!* When I rang my agent to ask about the rights, I heard they were owned by Steven Spielberg. At which point, I thought, *Okay, he's directing*, and forgot it. Then later, I heard Spielberg had moved to A.I. and was no longer involved, and I entered this strange 'audition' situation, where there were ten to fifteen people being considered to direct the *HARRY* film. I had to tell the Warner Bros. people what I felt about *Harry Potter*. I talked about the film in visual terms, and insisted it should be faithful to Rowling's book. It would just not be smart, for example, to combine elements of the first two *Harry* books into a single film. I thought it was vital to preserve the book's integrity." (The film of the second *Harry* book, *HARRY POTTER AND THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS*, is in pre-production.)

The rumor that the first two books might be merged—rather in the way Disney's *BLACK CAULDRON* combined the first two *Prydain* books by Lloyd Alexander—was circulating when Spielberg was linked with the project. There were other Spielberg

rumors in the trade press at this time, suggesting creative conflicts between the megahit director and Rowling. Allegedly, Spielberg wanted Haley Joel Osment (who went on to star in Spielberg's *A.I.*) in the lead role. An "unnamed" film executive claimed the reason Spielberg dropped out was that, "The Potter film wasn't going to be Spielberg's vision. It would have been a shared vision with the author. Spielberg had a more fanciful approach, and to be true to the book he would have had to portray Rowling's vision, not his."

Columbus has heard these rumors, but doesn't believe them. "Yes, I read those stories in *Entertainment Weekly*, but I think they're hearsay. My point-of-view is that Spielberg decided to make *A.I.* and that was it." David Heyman, producer of *HARRY POTTER*, explained, "We had a *HARRY* script, which Spielberg liked. But it was always very clear that he was considering three projects. One was *HARRY*, one was *A.I.* and the third was *MEMOIRS OF A GEISHA* [based on the novel by Arthur Golden]. He was always very clear that he would go for the first project that 'came together' in his judgment. And he stated, very clearly and gracefully, that he thought *A.I.* had come together first."

David Heyman's own involvement with *HARRY* had started back in 1997, before Potter-mania broke out. "I had moved back to London the previous year and was looking for a family movie to develop. This was many months before the *Harry* books became bestsellers in Britain. They had not even been published in America. Before *Harry*, I was considering a different children's book, by British fantasy writer Diana Wynne Jones." (Coincidentally, it has been just been announced that one of Jones's books will be animated by Studio Ghibli, the Japanese creators of *PRINCESS MONONOKE*.) "I've always been a fan of children's fiction. I read Grimm, Hans Christian Anderson, Roald Dahl, Philip Pullman (author of *The Golden Compass*), *Peter Pan*...."

"Then my assistant pointed out an article about the recently published *Harry Potter*, which had just won the Smarties prize, a major children's book award in Britain. My secretary read the book. We held meetings on Monday mornings, and she came in and talked about this story, about a young boy going to wizard school. I thought it sounded great. When I forwarded it to Warner Bros., the people there responded quickly; it wasn't hard to get them interested."

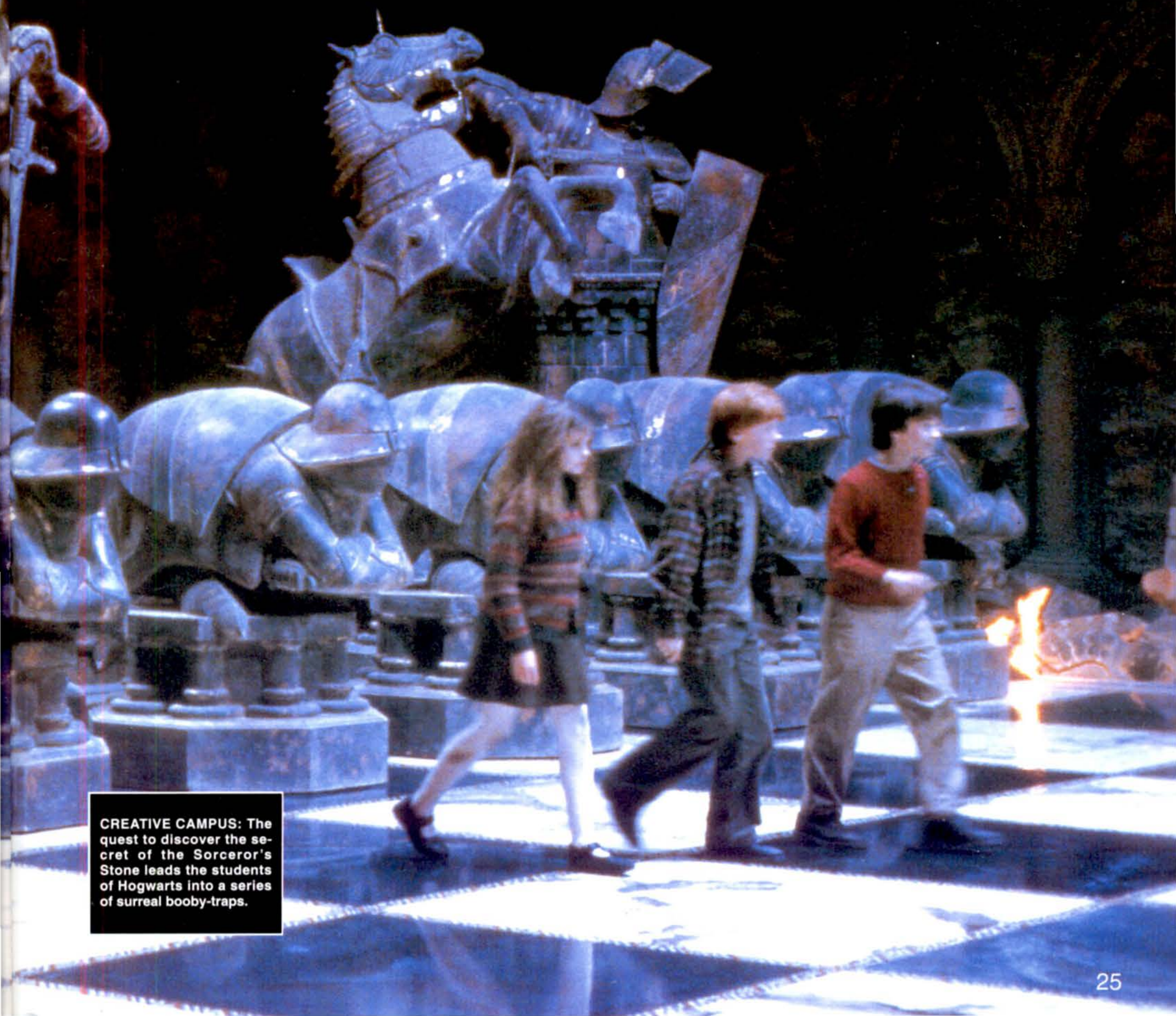
How did Heyman feel about taking on a



# Harry Potter

## and the Sorcerer's Stone

*Chris Columbus's Fantasy Homecoming:  
Bringing the Franchise to Film*



CREATIVE CAMPUS: The quest to discover the secret of the Sorcerer's Stone leads the students of Hogwarts into a series of surreal booby-traps.



"There was one occasion when Kloves and Heyman were arguing over a particular problem. I phoned my daughter, who gave us the answer."

—Director Chris Columbus

project like HARRY POTTER? "It's very exciting. In the end, we just have to put our minds to making the best HARRY POTTER film we possibly can. That's all we can do; we have no control over people's expectations, only the film itself. We've signed a great cast, great people in production design, costume design, and visual effects. We've tried to remain as true to the book as possible. To me, HARRY POTTER is a film for children of all ages, from six to ninety-six. At bottom, it's about characters who just happen to be children—their experiences and emotions are things anyone can access and relate to. Yes, there are some things that speak specifically to children, but the main story is universal."

After Spielberg dropped out, Heyman was one of the people who "auditioned" prospective directors. Some, like Columbus, had expressed a prior interest in HARRY, and some had not. "It was very clear to us that Chris Columbus was the best candidate for the job," said Heyman. "Chris is an Anglophile. He loves the Beatles, Monty Python, David Lean... He constantly references British culture. He's great working with children, and just 'got' the HARRY story. He understood the appeal and the adventure, this tale of a boy finding the home and family he never had. For him, it wasn't a project, but a passion. He talked about how it was vital to work with the writer,

that it would be utterly foolish not to."

Columbus confirmed there were four main people creating the film: himself; David Heyman; scriptwriter Steve Kloves; and J.K. Rowling. "Rowling provided us with descriptions and details that were not in the books," said Columbus. "If you're adapting *Frankenstein* or *Dracula*, you can hardly call up Mary Shelly or Bram Stoker and ask them what they think! But here, we could have the benefit of the original author's advice."

Heyman agreed. "We've consulted with Rowling at every step. I always wanted her involved, part of the team. She's an incredible resource of information, with her great depth of knowledge about everything in the *Potter* world."

Columbus added, however, that his own daughter helped too. "There was one occasion where Kloves and Heyman were arguing over a particular problem, and I phoned Eleanor, who gave us the answer. She's my resident Harry Potter expert."

Rowling worked especially closely with scriptwriter Steve Kloves, whose credits include *THE FABULOUS BAKER BOYS* and the recent *WONDER BOYS*. Like Columbus and Heyman, Kloves's introduction to *Harry Potter* was indirect. "If you do what I do, every now and again Warner Bros. sends me a package of book synopses they're con-

sidering. One of these contained *Harry Potter*. Of course, a synopsis of a couple of pages couldn't do justice to the book, but it intrigued me enough to make me want to read it. So I read the actual book, coming to it 'clean,' reading it as any book that might be turned into a film. And I flipped.

"After reading it, I learned it was something of a sensation in Britain, and that all American children of a certain age were reading it, but it hadn't become an international hit yet. A friend of mine joked that if I'd known how big *Harry* would get, I would never have taken it on!"

In Kloves's view, "Adapting HARRY POTTER was not too different a challenge for me from adapting *WONDER BOYS* (based on the novel by Michael Chabon). When you love a book, it's always your dream to get as much as possible into the film, even if you come to see you must compromise. In the case of *Harry*, we think the book is the film. It's always a challenge having to select which scenes and sequences are the essence of the story. I don't want to talk about specific changes we made. But we labored over the script together and made decisions over a long time period. Everyone was coming to the text as someone who loved the book, and I think we made the decisions that fans would have made in our position."

On a personal note, Kloves added, "I'm grateful for being able to come to know J.K. Rowling, and become friends with her. She's someone I would liked to have known whether she had written *Harry Potter* or not."

One challenge raised by POTTER, given that the main story takes place over a year, is how to convey the passage of time. Kloves agreed that this was a challenge. "It's always an issue in movies. It was, even in *WONDER BOYS*, which took place over a forty-eight-hour period. Much of the time, a scene just needs to 'feel' later; you can put a subtle touch in the middle of a scene that the audience doesn't notice consciously. In HARRY, the passage of time is also reflected by the characters learning and developing skills, and by the landscape around Hogwarts, which we actually see changing."

For Kloves, among the biggest challenges were the early scenes, where we see Harry's life with his cruel relatives, the Dursleys (played by Richard Griffiths and Fiona Shaw) and their unspeakable son Dudley (Harry Melling).

continued on page 29

**TALENT DISCOVERED:** Out of a field of over 300 prospects, Daniel Radcliffe was cast as novice wizard Harry Potter.





# Harry Potter

## DANIEL RADCLIFFE

### A Young Actor Becomes the World's Most Famous Wizard

For Daniel Radcliffe, a dream held by millions of children worldwide has come true. Radcliffe, a venerable twelve years old this summer, plays J.K. Rowling's hero in the film version of *HARRY POTTER AND THE SORCERER'S STONE*, which probably makes him the most envied boy in the world. Daunting prospect? Hardly. Despite the work, Radcliffe says he loved every minute of it.

"Harry is every single role you'd want to play," Radcliffe explained. "He's an all-round character, funny and brave. It's a real thrill, playing someone who's known worldwide. If I met a complete stranger and said I was Daniel Radcliffe, they'd never have heard of me. But if I said I was Harry Potter, they'd probably know everything about me."

Radcliffe is not quite a newcomer to acting, having previously appeared in *THE TAILOR OF PANAMA* starring Pierce Brosnan. He also played the young *DAVID COPPERFIELD* in a BBC TV adaptation of the Dickens classic, which coincidentally featured *HARRY POTTER*'s Maggie Smith.

It was Radcliffe's role in *DAVID* that caught the attention of director Chris Columbus. By another coincidence, Columbus was already acquainted with Radcliffe's father, literary agent Alan Radcliffe. The deciding point was when producer David Heyman saw Radcliffe, an event the boy remembers as decidedly mysterious. "My family was in a theatre, watching a play," said the actor, "and David Heyman was in the row in front of us. He turned around in his seat and just looked at me. I had no idea who he was at the time. In the interval, he talked with my father for a bit. In the second half, he was also looking at me! At the end,

he asked to meet me, and so I went for some screen tests, first with a video camera, and then with the film camera, which was really cool."

How did Radcliffe's experience of *HARRY* compare to *TAILOR OF PANAMA* and *DAVID COPPERFIELD*? "I was only in *TAILOR* in a few scenes. And compared to *DAVID*, *HARRY POTTER* was made on such a huge scale. For most of the time, *DAVID* used only one camera, very occasionally two. *HARRY* normally used three cameras, sometimes four. A lot of *DAVID* was filmed on location, but *HARRY* used these enormous, elaborate sets: for example, the chess room at the end of the film—built at Leavesden Studios."

Radcliffe took to the environment like...well, a boy wizard to Quidditch. "There was never a boring moment. There was always something going on, and loads of people around, which I love." (The interview moderator with Radcliffe added he was the only person she knew who literally "bounced in" and "bounced out" of a film set.) The film was also a perfect education for a young actor. "I learned how to find the right thought in a scene, and focus and project it through my eyes," said Radcliffe. "I also learned a lot about film-making."

Radcliffe "worked" nine-hour days but, due to legal requirements, three to five hours would be tutoring, with filming spread over the day. "I had a wonderful tutor," said Radcliffe, perhaps pragmatically, "but at times I would plead, 'Let me go!' when I was being taught algebra or stuff and wanted to get back to filming." But it wasn't all work. "I've kept in touch with all my friends through e-mail...they think it's very exciting, especial-



ON HIM IT LOOKS GOOD: Director Chris Columbus helps Daniel Radcliffe try on the Sorting Hat.

ly one friend who's read the fourth *HARRY* book [a hefty 600 pages] eight times over."

How did Radcliffe get on with his Hogwarts schoolmates? "Rupert [Grint] and Emma [Watson] are a lot like their characters, Ron and Hermione. Rupert is very funny, and Emma is really intelligent. We got on great and stuck together a lot, though there were lots of other children who were great, like Matthew Lewis, who plays Neville." Harry's owl companion Hedwig took slightly more getting used to. "I had a glove for my scenes with Hedwig. He dug in a bit, but once you're used to having an enormous bird on your arm, it's okay."

How about Harry's enemies? "Harry Melling [who plays Harry's boorish cousin Dudley] was really nice. And I got on well with Tom Felton [Hogwarts bully Draco Malfoy] because we share the same music tastes." Did that make it difficult to act out the characters' hate-hate relationship? "No, we could be joking for a while, but when filming started we would focus, get into character, and stop laughing about."

Radcliffe talked about his adult co-stars with equal fondness. "I really liked Robbie Coltrane [Hagrid]. He was really funny—you'd say something and he'd come back with something witty. Maggie Smith has a very dry wit, very clever; we got on really well. Alan Rickman [who plays the malevolent Pro-

fessor Snape] also has a very dry wit. In the potions lesson scenes, I had to remind myself he was only acting. He was really scary, not in a gory sense, but scary."

Radcliffe has met his character's creator, J.K. Rowling. "She's really nice, she's fantastic and so's her daughter." (Rowling herself commented that meeting Radcliffe was like "being reunited with her long-lost son.") Equally naturally, Radcliffe has read all four published *Potter* books and loves them. Does he read the later books and envision himself acting out the scenes? "Yes, you do it kind of instinctively. I read the books and see the sets and actors from the first film. I've also re-read the second book (*Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*) in preparation for the new film. I'm definitely looking forward to getting back!"

So what does Radcliffe see as the secret of Harry's appeal? "Harry's character is to be very loyal to his friends, very brave, and to stand up for himself. And I think it's people's whole love of magic. Magic has been done many times before, but not the way *HARRY POTTER* does it. You often get stories with vampires and evil sorcerers. There's some of that in *HARRY*, but it's more about a boy who has a secret not many people in the normal world know; then he steps into a magic world and suddenly everyone's heard of him. It's really a big journey of discovery."

—Andrew Osmond



# Harry Potter

## THE PHENOMENON

### Who Knew One Young Wizard Could Be So Popular...or Controversial?



WHO NEEDS ATMS? Harry Potter's immersion in the world of wizards includes a visit to Gringotts's Bank.

For prophetic dialogue, you can't beat the opening chapter of *Harry Potter and Sorcerer's Stone* (or for the benefit of pedantic UK fans, *Philosopher's Stone*). In one of the book's most poignant scenes, baby Harry is taken from the home of his dead parents to live with his relatives. The executors of this sad duty are Dumbledore, saintly headmaster of the magic school Hogwarts, and his loyal deputy, Professor McGonagall. The duo are two of the most important figures in the *Harry* universe, played on film by Richard Harris and Maggie Smith.

As Dumbledore explains his plan for Harry's upbringing, Professor McGonagall is aghast, thinking of Harry's status in the magic world. After all, not many babies can...but that'd be telling. "He'll be famous, a legend!" she declares heatedly. "I wouldn't be surprised if today was known as Harry Potter Day in future! There will be books written about Harry! Every child in our world will know his name!"

And in a good chunk of our world too. We are, after all, talking about a book series with a run of 110 million copies, published in two hundred countries. A series that requires parallel editions for the swelling ranks of adult readers, who might be adverse to buying a book from the kids' section. And don't forget the hoo-ha two summers ago, when the fourth *Harry* title, *Goblet of Fire*, caused the kind of excitement that makes *Phantom Menace* seem small potatoes. Heaven knows what next time will be like....

The true story of *Harry* is almost as familiar as the fantasy. British writer Joanne Kathleen Rowling started writing about the boy wizard while teaching in Portugal. As she told the UK newspaper, *The Guardian*, by the time she returned to Britain, "I had not only a four-month-old baby [daughter Jessica] but one-third of *Harry Potter*. So I had to finish it." The press made much of the fact that *Sorcerer's Stone* was completed while Rowling was divorced and on income support, writing in cafes and parks as her baby slept. Rowling resents this ("I was defined by the saddest part of my life"), but acknowledges it added to the *Potter* legend.

Published in Britain in 1997, *Harry* was not the overnight success it seems today. The first book was critically praised and won the Smarties Award for children's fiction. It was not, however, an instant hit. *Harry*'s popularity rose when his second adventure, *Chamber of Secrets*, arrived the next year, but he only exploded into the stratosphere with 1999's *Prisoner of Azkaban*. (Luckily for Heyman, he had optioned the first two *Potter* books by then, at a relatively cheap \$700,000.)

Since then, Rowling and her books have continually won prizes and honors. *Chamber* and *Prisoner* each won the Smarties Award, causing Rowling to ask not to be considered in future. *Prisoner* made headlines (and caused seizures) by being nominated for Britain's literary Whitbread Award. It lost, but its successor *Goblet of Fire* snagged the SF/Fantasy Hugo Award this summer. Rowling was also honored in

2000 with an OBE, Order of the British Empire.

Inevitably, all this success brought backlash. In conservative states, charges were leveled against the books' promotion of wizardry and witchcraft, with evangelicals railing against the books' "satanic" popularity. And it wasn't just the Christian Right who were unhappy. American author Nancy K. Stouffer claimed Rowling pinched copyrighted names and ideas from her 1984 book *The Legend of Rah and Muggles*, an argument—loudly promoted on Stouffer's "Real Muggles" web-site—that this writer finds hilarious (but that readers should check out for themselves).

Meanwhile, the *Sunday Times* and *New York Times* papers barred Potter from their main bestseller lists. Apparently they weren't proper grown-up books unlike, er, the novelization of *The Phantom Menace*. More seriously, some critics argued the *Potter* books simply weren't any good. The main charges were that they were bland, lightweight, and unoriginal. The school-story trappings, with a hero determined to live up to his teachers' and parents' standards, were judged reactionary beside the anarchy of Roald Dahl or Bart Simpson. Noting Rowling's simple, unadorned prose, some critics put *Potter*'s success down to a "post-literate" generation of readers.

To be fair, Potter has eclipsed other arguably much better and certainly more sophisticated books in the children's fantasy field. Two current writers are often cited: Philip Pullman, author of the sinister and heretical *Dark Materials* trilogy, and Diana Wynne Jones, writer of countless fiendishly clever children's fantasies over thirty years. Ironically, David Heyman was considering a Jones book, *The Ogre Downstairs*, before turning to *Harry*. This writer recommends another fantasy, *So You Want to be a Wizard*, by Diane Duane (and before anyone asks, it was written fifteen years before *Harry*).

That said, many anti-Potter pundits judge by narrow standards. After all, Rowling never set herself up as a competitor to Pullman or Jones. The "bland prose" attack could be equally made for C.S. Lewis's much-loved *Narnia* books, or even Tolkien's *Hobbit*. These are books read for their stories, not poetic writing. What naysayers seem to despise is that the *Potter* books are not primarily concerned with subversion or subtext (though there are archetypes aplenty). Rather, the books are simply fun, filled with places one would like to be and friends one would like to know. The dialogue is amusing, the conceits charming, the plot stakes high. What more do you need?

—Andrew Osmond



"On the one hand, there's a lot of humor in the Dursley scenes," said Kloves. "On the other, the Dursleys are, basically, very nasty and abusive. I didn't shy away from that. What I tried to do was convey the emotional landscape from Harry's point-of-view, focusing on how it affected him. Harry is very watchful, and also has reservoirs of courage through enduring his life with the Dursleys. I wanted the sense of a boy emerging from darkness, both literally—the Dursleys force him to live in a cupboard—and emotionally. The whole movie tends to express itself through Harry. I prefer such single-viewpoint films."

The story starts in the "real" world, then moves into the thoroughly magical setting of Hogwarts. Whereas some fantasy films—Henry Selick's part-animated *JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH* comes to mind—portray even "reality" as stylized and dreamlike, *HARRY* does not take this course. "People in England, especially London, will see places that are recognizable," said Kloves. (For example, the magic-selling Diagon Alley is a fantastical location, but the entrance is hidden in Central London.) "The Dursleys may behave in a theatrical way, but they live in mundane surroundings. It doesn't look like another world. The contrast between the opening and Hogwarts is mainly used to express Harry's journey out of dark into light, into a place where—with a few unpleasant exceptions—he finds that people embrace him."

"I can relate it to things in my original scripts, in terms of the darkness in Harry and his quiet watchfulness. Harry may be a cipher compared to the characters around

him, but I'm comfortable writing that sort of person—I was on the quiet side as a child, watchful, like Harry. I was the kid who would sit in an airport lounge and watch the dramas going on around me."

The many scenes between Harry and his schoolfriends Ron and Hermione also appealed to Kloves. "I recognize aspects of all three main children. I especially love Hermione—she's funny without knowing it; aggravating and brilliant. They were fun to write for. Each has a distinct, singular voice, which is great for a writer. You can't write a line for Ron that Harry would say, for example."

What was the *HARRY POTTER* shoot like? According to Heyman, "The two main challenges were handling the visual effects and working with lead actors who were children, who could only work four-and-a-half hours a day and had to

have regular schooling. It was like trying to work with Jack Nicholson when the Lakers are playing!"

From Columbus's point of view, "In a sense, it was one of the more difficult shoots I've done, in terms of the amount of solid work. At the same time, it was the most pleasurable. Given the quality of the material and the people you're working with, I couldn't help love being a director."

For Columbus, *HARRY* was an opportunity to return to past glories. "Before *HARRY*, I felt I'd lost touch with the kind of films I had worked on in the '80s. People were saying, 'He's never done anything as good as *GREMLINS* [which Columbus scripted].' And that was a matter of material. It's vital to find the right material, and *HARRY POTTER* presented the opportunity." On the subject of past work, Columbus agreed there are parallels between *HARRY* and *YOUNG SHERLOCK HOLMES*, the Columbus-scripted adventure film released in 1985. "Both films have two boys and a girl in an English boarding school, solving a mystery with a supernatural atmosphere. Visually, *HARRY POTTER*'s unlike anything I've done, but in terms of adventure and darkness, there's a bit of *GREMLINS* and *SHERLOCK* in there."

On casting, Columbus said, "I know some other directors considered by Warners had terrible ideas, about casting an American as Harry or doing a mixed cast of British and American actors. Awful ideas. To me, the book felt so amazingly *British*. The last thing I wanted was a *MARY POPPINS* version, with Dick Van Dyke accents!" Predictably, the most difficult casting decision was Harry himself. "The actor had to embody depth and a 'haunted' quali-



**INNOCENCE AND MALEVOLENCE:** Robbie Coltrane (top) is the lovable, if somewhat monstrous, Hagrid, while Alan Rickman waxes (surprise!) villainous as Professor Snape. **BELOW LEFT:** Director Chris Columbus works with John Hurt.





ty," said Columbus. "He's been abused for much of his life, shut away in a cupboard for years. The character is not your average, happy-go-lucky eleven-year-old."

In their search for the right Harry, the filmmakers received 40,000 submissions, and interviewed over 300 boys. Many publications wrongly reported the winner as Gabriel Thompson, a thirteen-year-old who appeared in the recent ADVENTURES OF PINOCCHIO. (The mistake stemmed from a report on the movie site *Ain't it Cool News*.) In fact, Columbus had his eye on someone else entirely.

"I saw Daniel Radcliffe in the BBC production of DAVID COPPERFIELD," said Columbus. "I

never going to get him, because his parents don't want him in that kind of role." But I talked to Daniel's parents, and convinced them the film could be a good environment and their son would be treated properly."

David Heyman reserved special praise for the young actors. "I think the children are the strongest aspect of the film. They're real, true, unsentimental, and funny. The greatest joy for me is seeing the kids; not just the three leads, but also Tom Felton (Malfoy) and the other Hogwarts children. The actors really carry the film. Let's not fool ourselves. I'm sure young viewers will get tremendous enjoyment watching Quid-ditch being played, seeing Harry fight a troll, and so on, and that will be a huge part of the film's appeal. But what will make the film stand out, and make it appeal to all ages, is the fact it's a *human* story."

Beyond the child leads, Harry boasts the kind of star cast usually confined to animated films. As mentioned above, Alan Rickman plays the sinister Professor Snape (looking in press photos very like his Metatron character in Kevin Smith's DOGMA). Robbie Coltrane is the giant-sized Hagrid, while Maggie Smith, star of THE PRIME OF MISS JEAN BRODIE, is the strict but fair Professor McGonagall. Stage veteran Richard Harris, recently seen as the aging emperor Marcus Aurelius in Ridley Scott's GLADIATOR, plays Hogwarts' kindly headmaster, Dumbledore.

Among the smaller roles, one familiar face is British comedian John Cleese, immortalized on TV through MONTY PYTHON and FAWLTY TOWERS and on the big screen in A FISH CALLED WANDA. Cleese plays Hogwarts' ghostly resident, Sir Nicholas de Mimsy-Porpington, also known as Nearly Headless Nick because...well, you work it out. Julie Walters, familiar from such British films as BUSTER and BILLY ELLIOT, plays Mrs. Weasley, mother of Harry's friend Ron. Meanwhile, the diminutive charms teacher Professor

Flitwick is played by Warwick Davis, familiar to fantasy fans for his title role in George Lucas's heroic fantasy WILLOW.

"We were very lucky," said Heyman of the film's impressive cast. "The books had fans, after all. Richard Harris, for example,

didn't know *Harry Potter* but his granddaughter said she'd never speak to him again if he didn't do the part! Basically, we got who we wanted. Rowling has very diverse, distinct characters; the actors felt they could work in the parts and that it would be a great world to act in. Some of the actors were specifically sought by Rowling, including Maggie Smith and Robbie Coltrane."

Steve Kloves found the largely British cast congenial. "I think British actors have more of a fidelity to the text. They follow what's written on the page and try to make the lines work. If they question a piece of dialogue, it'll be for a good reason."

In order to convey a place as vast and magical as Hogwarts, the filmmakers used a range of venerable locations. "We wanted different things from each location," said Heyman. The cathedrals at Durham and Gloucester provided backdrops, as did two institutions at Oxford University: the Bodleian library and Christ Church College. Alnwick Castle in Northumberland was also used, as was the Goathland steam-railway station in Yorkshire, where some of the first filming took place.

There were reports of a minor controversy. Allegedly, Warner Bros. approached Canterbury Cathedral for filming some Hogwarts scenes, but were turned down after religious objections to the book's portrayal of magic and wizards. David Heyman claims these reports were a distortion. "We were talking to Canterbury, true, but Gloucester was the best place for the film. It has unparalleled vaulted ceilings and cloisters, ideal for Hogwarts." Other filming was done in London and southern England, and on the stages of Leavesden Studios in Hertfordshire.

On the issue of special effects, the filmmakers are anxious not to give away much of HARRY's magic. However, Columbus compares the film's approach to JURASSIC PARK. "It's a combination of animatronics and CG effects. Our goal was to make Hogwarts and all the magic creatures feel real. We didn't want the CG characters to feel fantastic, otherworldly. As you'll know if you've seen the trailers with Fluffy and the troll, we've gone for fairly realistic versions. They could have been much more cartoony and fantastical." (For readers who don't know what Fluffy is...wait and see!)

"The children really took to working with the effects. We were careful to explain what was happening, and always gave them something to look at. It was important they were in the same 'reality' as the special-ef-

**FANTASTIC FACULTY:** Warwick Davis delivers double the performance as both Professor Flitwick (left) and a bank teller goblin.



thought he looked perfect, an amazing actor. At the time, I was getting frustrated with searching for the right Harry, and so was my casting director. I picked up the cassette of DAVID COPPERFIELD and said, 'This is the person I want!' She replied, 'Well, you're

"Rowling specifically sought actors like Maggie Smith. Richard Harris's granddaughter said she'd never speak to him if he didn't do the part."

—Producer David Heyman



fects elements."

Heyman agreed. "What I find in some films is that they're not really integrated with the actors. We're setting this film in a timeless, classical world... It's important the magic elements are a convincing part." From Kloves's viewpoint, "I collaborate with Columbus over describing effects in the script. There's often a back-and-forth process. I'll put something preliminary, and then a particular kind of effect becomes possible and that may change the dialogue, at which point I might have a visual idea, and so on."

There seems little doubt **HARRY POTTER AND THE SORCERER'S**



**MAGIC ENVIRONS:** Landmark cathedrals and even Oxford University provided the locations for the legendary Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

STONE will be a tremendous success, with a buzz round the film to rival **LORD OF THE RINGS**. (In Britain, incidentally, the film will be called **HARRY POTTER AND THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE**, the book's British title. Heyman confirmed dialogue will be re-mixed for the appropriate scenes, so expect 'British' and 'American' options on the eventual DVD.) And like Peter Jackson's Tolkien adaptation, **HARRY POTTER** is not just a film, but a series, a franchise. There are three further *Harry* books in print, and three more to come, covering Harry's full seven years in Hogwarts. Does Warners want to film them? Does Hagrid have hair?

"We're in the early stages of pre-

production on **HARRY POTTER AND THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS**," said Columbus, who confirms he's down to direct the story of Harry's second year. "For me, it's an honor to continue making these films. And whether it's me or someone else directing Harry's later adventures, it will be so intriguing following these characters through their lives."

The second film retains most of the main team from **SORCERER'S STONE**, including the three leads. But will the children continue if Warners asks for a third, a fifth, or even a seventh installment? Rowling's characters age through their adventures, but can a young actor cope with the schedule through his or her adolescence? Columbus

is hopeful. "I think it would be great if you could keep the same lead actors all the way through the se-

ries. Just imagine, sitting down twenty years later, watching all the films on video, seeing the characters grow before your eyes."

Heyman added, "We're hoping to get **CHAMBER OF SECRETS** out by Christmas, 2002. It would be great, as the characters are a year older in each book." Regarding a third film, which would presumably be based on Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, Heyman said the people at Warners are, not unreasonably, waiting to see how **SORCERER'S STONE** does first. "Could the series carry on, a film a year? I have a few gray hairs now. If I produced an annual seven-film series, my hair would be white by the end!"

Kloves is already scripting **CHAMBER OF SECRETS**. "I don't regard it as a sequel, because it's not a rehash. Each *Harry* book is a year in these kids' lives. In the first film, Harry was getting used to the magic, and seeing everything with amazed wonder. In the second film, the wonder's still there, but informed by experience. And the plot's more sinister..."

Kloves, however, wondered what will happen if the series reaches the six-hundred page *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*? "Goblet would need to be two movies to do it justice," said Kloves. "It's a fabulous book, but needs to be split for the screen." Will the series stretch to eight films, or more? Stay tuned.

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# THE LORD OF THE RINGS

## THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING

### *The Adventure Begins: How Peter Jackson and Company Brought Middle-Earth to the Screen*

By Ross Plesset

For nearly forty-five years, filmmakers have tried unsuccessfully to adapt J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*—widely regarded as one of the most influential books of the twentieth century. But beyond celebrated New Zealand filmmaker Peter Jackson's passion and credibility, it took a series of fortunate circumstances to set into motion the transformation of the visionary, literary trilogy into an equally landmark trio of films.

"Peter Jackson always had two great film-franchise passions," said executive producer and long-time friend, Mark Ordesky. "One was KING KONG, which he developed at Universal for a period of time, and that didn't work out. The other was *Lord of the Rings*."

"Peter had a first-look deal at Miramax after HEAVENLY CREATURES, which Miramax distributed. Miramax pursued the rights to *Lord of the Rings* on Peter's behalf—this would have been mid-'96 or early '97—and they developed it for about eighteen months. Ultimately, they made the decision that they didn't want to go forward with the movies on the basis that Peter wanted to go forward on. At that time Peter was just trying to convince them to do two films. Nobody thought anyone would ever do [three]. When Miramax put it into turnaround, New Line stepped in and took the project over."

Ordesky was present when the idea of making three films came about. "It was during a meeting with [New Line Chairman] Bob Shaye and Peter Jackson. Peter made this pitch. After Bob Shaye heard the pitch, he said, 'Well I don't understand. There's three books, why aren't you making three films?' It was one of these great moments—I'll

remember it forever. Peter gave Bob this look like, 'Dare I hope that you're actually saying that?' [Laughter] It was like, 'Don't tease me!' That was where the decision got made to make it as three films, as it should be made, rather than as two.... In the mythology of the LORD OF THE RINGS movie-making process, that meeting, that moment, was a critical, critical moment. So New Line's involvement started at that time. It was August of 1998, and I was as-

signed to supervise the project on behalf of the studio."

#### EMBRACE OF MIDDLE-EARTH: ADAPTING THE TRILOGY

At the time Ordesky joined the project, the LORD OF THE RINGS script had been underway for some time. The writers included Jackson, his partner Fran Walsh, Philippa Boyens, and Stephen Sinclair. For Boyens, a major Tolkien fan who had pre-





viously written only stage plays, these screenplays were her first.

Her involvement came about in August of 1997. "For three years prior to that, I had been the director of the New Zealand Writer's Guild," she said, "so I knew Fran and Peter through friends. They knew of my love for the books." She read their adaptation, which was in treatment form. "It was one whole sweep of all three books that was intended at that time to be turned into two films. Miramax had the rights to *Lord of the Rings*."

"When I read Peter and Fran's treatment, it sort of made me a believer. Because of my love of the books, I had mixed feelings about reading a treatment. When I read it I said, 'Wow, I want to see this!'" She laughed. "Certain aspects of *The Lord of the Rings* are very critical, especially the journey of Frodo. Peter and Fran managed to capture that. If you think of *Lord of the Rings*, certain events stand out in your mind; they stand out as defining what the story is, defining the epic nature of the story, [and] defining the world of Middle-Earth. Those events make the book what it is, and they remained intact. So I was surprised, then relieved, and then excited."



**UNASSUMING HEROES:** As proprietors of a power that could destroy the world, the Hobbits (Elijah Wood as Frodo, above on left, and Billy Boyd as Pippin, on right) must fight off the forces of darkness. **LEFT:** The ring wraiths attack.

When the two-film project became three films, the script naturally changed. "It gave us more room in the first story [*The Fellowship of the Ring*]," said Boyens. "It allowed the end—the breaking of the fellowship—to take place more naturally. It was a case of not so much being able to fit moments back in, than being able to follow the natural course of the three more read-

ily."

Some of the moments not included—and which are among Boyens's favorites—were the Hobbits' journey through the Old Forest, and their encounter with the barrow-wights (animated corpses possessed by evil spirits). Venturing into the Old Forest would require a lot of explanation, the author maintained, and give the hero Frodo a false start to his journey. Also, incidents like the barrow-wights required too much screen time to set up and explain.

Also omitted was the highly-popular, yet peripheral, character of Tom Bombadil. "That was a decision made at the treatment stage," Boyens said, "and I think it was the correct decision to make. It's not that he doesn't exist. We leave the Hobbits at one point and all of that could have happened



before we join them again. That's the way I like to look at it! [Laughter.] He's still there in the book for readers to discover and enjoy. As a joke, Peter and I one day did do one little moment with Tom Bombadil in it. It was more a sense of his presence, a fleeting moment. We played with the idea very briefly of the journey through the Old Forest because the sequence with Old Man Willow [which involves Bombadil] is such a brilliant one dramatically. Unfortunately, all of these events tend to make it episodic, which you can't afford to do on a film."

One scene that needed simplifying was the Council of Elrond, in Rivendell. "Many, many, many issues are discussed in there, including Tom [Bombadil], and I love that discussion about Tom Bombadil. I think it's fantastic! As a reader you can enjoy that, but you can imagine how that would stop a story dead and stop the momentum and pacing if you brought all those story strands into the film."

To further avoid the story from stopping at this point, the writers exploited Frodo's perils both before and after his stay in Rivendell. "You have one jeopardy after another. Frodo is pursued by the ring wraiths, he reaches Rivendell, and then he

pear until the last volume. "It's a quick-reference moment," said Boyens. "You want a sense that Sam has something...as he leaves home and sets out on this adventure. This little Hobbit has something to live for; that there's another life back there for him, or at least a life he could have had. You also need some light at the beginning, because, as everyone knows, the story gets very dark. You need as much joy and light in the front of the story, and you need to see Frodo and Sam carefree, as they were before the ring came into their lives. I think that's very important as well."

Also fleshed out is the human-elf romance of Aragorn and Arwen. "Although there is some invention on our part, it is not something that breaks the world of the story. We know that they were together in Rivendell, [and] we can imagine that they went off and talked. In the book, Frodo sees them together. He understands there's

about that first meeting, and this love is very different. Also, it informs so much of what Aragorn carries with him—just as Sam does—into the world. [Arwen] as a character is very interesting, because she has a different view of the situation than some of the other characters, and [here, too,] we drew on the appendices. She has a kind of determination to hold on to what she loves and what she believes in and not be bound like her brothers are bound. She is like a shining light. I love her character and love the portrayal Liv [Tyler] gave her."

Another challenge was giving adequate exposition to a large cast of characters. "When you're writing an original screenplay, you would never in your right mind write a fellowship of nine people! [Laughed] You wouldn't have four Hobbits, you would have two. But I love those challenges, and I have to honestly say that

the actors that we have brought so much to them that to me it's not an issue. Gimli is who Gimli is, and Legolas is as well, and they all bring different nuances to different moments in the film. I think there will be moments that you might not ever see, except maybe on DVD, later on. But they played those characters so

well; they bring them to life. The eyes do so much, don't they? One look from Legolas as he encounters the Balrog says a lot. Orlando Bloom,

with that one look, shows you exactly how elves feel about this creature. It's extraordinary!"

She also found Tolkien's dialogue tremendously challenging to condense. "It's always the good stuff that you find the hardest to leave out. Audience members have a limited capacity for enduring exposition. At some point, they must be free to understand the story and be involved." Nevertheless, many of her favorite lines made it to the screen, including her very favorite, Galadriel's farewell to Frodo, "May it be a light to you in dark places when all other lights go out."

(Boyens is quite good at reciting Tolkien's lines.) "I love that because that's the sort of thing every mother wishes for their child." Boyens cited her ear for Tolkien's language as among her overall contributions. It helped in shortening scenes and creating new ones.

Working with writers Peter Jackson and Fran Walsh was an immensely enjoyable experience for Boyens. "I honestly can say that it was real a team effort." Jackson, she said, is a great collaborator. "I've never seen anyone with such an eye for a good



**MASS CLASSIC:** The trick for the filmmakers was staying true to Tolkien's vision while making *FELLOWSHIP* accessible to the general public. **LEFT:** Ian McKellen as Gandalf. **ABOVE:** Ian Holm as Bilbo says farewell.



has another jeopardy following that: Saruman and his attempts to get his hands on the ring. But the main jeopardy—the evil of the ring—is continuous. It is this jeopardy that is critical to keeping the story going. In a way, the ring is Frodo's greatest enemy."

To sharpen the focus on the characters, certain aspects of the story were expanded upon. For example, Sam's romantic interest, Rosie Cotton, is introduced in the first film, whereas in the story she does not ap-

pear until the last volume. "If you go to the appendix, you find out exactly what that story is. What is great in the film is being able to almost eavesdrop on that moment and see what lies between these two."

"What I like about [the Aragorn and Arwen] story is it's a very ancient love. They're not in the first throes of their love. This is a love that has endured for a long time. I love that, because you don't often see that on film. Often love in the movies is



idea. Always, he can encompass something and take something of yours, and you know it's going to be better. He will always sort of expand it and take it into that area of wonderment that I was talking about earlier. I love the look he gets in his eyes when he's excited about an idea."

Boyens would love to script ad-



**FLESH IN FANTASY:** New Zealand's WETA Workshop took on the daunting task of envisioning some of the most famous lifeforms in literature. **ABOVE:** Vicious orcs. **LEFT:** Director Peter Jackson checks out a Hobbit hole.



shop, has worked with Jackson since the infamous "Muppets meet William Burroughs" farce, **MEET THE FEEBLES**

(1989). Following the cancellation of Jackson's **KING KONG**, WETA went through a slow period. Fortunately, however, "Peter came and reinvigorated us all when he said, 'Hey, guess what, everybody? There's a chance that we could be making **THE HOBBIT**.' For a long time we believed that we were going to be making **THE HOBBIT**. As it turned out, Peter was in very clever and tricky negotiations with Miramax to actually make **LORD OF THE RINGS**. When we finally heard that information, it was obviously a magnificent moment in all of our careers."

One of WETA's earliest undertakings was designing the trilogy's many creatures. "One of the things that I was particularly keen on with our designers was to pursue what I call 'iconic

each character, so even if you see them in silhouette in the distance, you can tell exactly which character is which and which species is which. Some of our earliest work was spent generating the iconographic look of the different species."

Most of the creature designs were done very quickly. "As with Peter, we're great believers of artistic inspiration and getting things to gel quickly through discussions.... About twelve of the maquettes that were done in the first three or four weeks are actually major characters in the final film: wraiths (in true form), orcs, [the cave troll], and the Army of the Dead."

A lengthier and more involved process was designing the uruk-hai orcs, creations of the malevolent wizard Saruman. Although they vary in appearance, surprisingly little experimentation was done design-wise. "We did more design work on the uruk-hai than any other character, but that design work stayed within an incredibly tight confine. We wanted people to relate to these characters as Saruman's interpretation of a superior race [for a] fighting force. Therefore, we didn't want to remove them too far from the human figure. I believe that the only truly scary thing in the world is other humans. Therefore, the more closely aligned the uruk-hai are to the brutish,

ditional Tolkien stories such as *The Hobbit* or *The Silmarillion*. However, she is currently adapting Ursula K. Le Guin's *Earth-*

gy's many creatures. "One of the things that I was particularly keen on with our designers was to pursue what I call 'iconic

"You've got to appreciate that Gollum is a totally schizophrenic character. Our creature had to convey the subtleties of two completely different personalities."

—WETA Workshop Co-Founder Richard Taylor

sea trilogy for the Sci Fi Channel, and is involved with additional Jackson-Walsh projects. She also expects to be writing minor pick-up scenes for **THE LORD OF THE RINGS** over the next two years.

#### **FANTASTIC LIVES: CREATURES AND COSTUMES**

While the script was being written in mid-1997, other aspects of pre-production were being geared up. Richard Taylor, co-founder of creature house WETA Work-

design," he continued. "That is, designing the fundamentally different looks of the different species. A great deal of the public that will see these movies will not have read the books. Therefore, this vast and complex cultural inheritance within the story will be foreign to a lot of people. So it's imperative that, on the first viewing, you can very quickly get a visual grasp of the different characters and the different species within the story. To achieve that, it is crucial that you create visual icons of

violent, maniacal nature of the worst humans, the closer we could get to the deep-rooted fear that the Hobbits feel in their journey.

"From a singular perspective, the two trickiest characters to really get our heads around early on were Gollum and Treebeard, primarily because they were so loved by the world. The world has such a strong, preconceived idea of what those characters look like from a written description out of a book. [That] was a very heavy



# THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING

## Special Effects

### *High-Tech and Low-Tech Combined to Create Middle-Earth*

**T**he tasks of the WETA Workshop on *THE LORD OF THE RINGS: FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING* were many and varied. One of the biggest challenges initially was deciding how to shrink human-sized actors into Hobbits. Just as a magician uses several tricks and mixes them to keep an audience guessing, the filmmakers decided to combine several techniques. In some shots, the actors were shrunk digitally. For others, visual-effects cameraman Brian Van't Hul (*CONTACT*) devised methods of forced perspective.

When to use the different techniques was the subject of lengthy discussions. "We would have these 6:00 A.M., big round-table meetings with Peter chairing them," recalled production designer Grant Major. "We would have the computer guys there, and we would have Richard Taylor's WETA guys there, who were responsible for puppet-making, and I would be there. We just went through Peter's storyboards, and we would debate how we would do each and every shot."

Major described one shot where Frodo and Gandalf are riding in a wagon. "We essentially had to split the wagon in two, [with] part of it over-scale and part of it human-scale, and have the camera locked onto a rig that also had the wagon locked to it. Everything was keyed together for this forced-perspective to work. We had Ian McKellen as Gandalf on a human-sized part of [the wagon], and we would have Frodo suspended on a plank way, way back, so he looked smaller but they're still in the same shot. They would be talking and interacting with each other, so their eyelines were a little bit different than what they would normally be."

For some of the interior scenes, another approach was taken. In one case, a room was built in normal scale, but a bed in the foreground was built oversized to accommodate the Hobbits.

To depict the trilogy's fantastic environments, WETA built elaborate miniatures. In all, sixty-eight were built by a crew that averaged seven. Because of their size, some of the models were dubbed "big-atures."

"Some of them are a lot bigger than a large house," said Richard Taylor, laughing. "You can literally live inside them. All of that is relative to how big Alan Lee draws a human figure inside one of his sketches." The "big-atures" included the western gate to Moria, with an adjacent lake;

Moria's Khazad-dum Stairs; Minas Tirith, and sections of it; Cirith Ungol; and Minas Morgul (the latter three will be seen in the second and third films.) Most of the miniatures were filmed indoors to control the lighting, "but we filmed the Isengard basin and Orthanc outside, because of the immense size of them!"

A few of the models served a secondary purpose: They were selling tools for Miramax. "We built Rivendell and Helm's Deep [an ancient fortification that figures in film two] to show the dramatically different and very unique architecture that existed between these two cultures," Taylor said. "I think we bought over ten thousand thirty-fifth-scale soldiers, which we composed in huge battle movements around Helm's Deep. Then Peter filmed these with a 'lipstick' camera that gave some idea of the massive scope of these brutal and visceral battles that he was envisaging in his head."

Concept artist Alan Lee was heavily involved in the miniatures. "We were allowed to work directly from Alan's sketches. We didn't have to work from blueprints. Peter was adamant that if we worked directly from Alan's drawings, little would be lost from the sketch to the miniature. Because Alan was in our workshop for most of the project, he was able to keep a relatively constant eye on our progress as we constructed the miniatures. Indeed, [he] would lend a hand on many an occasion to get something just right."

As far as the use of miniatures in a CG era, Taylor had a ready explanation: "There have been some amazing leaps and bounds made in digital effects environment simulation in the last couple of years. [However,] both Peter, myself, and our miniature team still believe that there is a textural realism that miniatures bring to a film."

How does WETA decide when to use models and when to use CG? "Primarily it's controlled by what we can achieve with camera movement. Even on a miniature, it's sometimes impossible to get the range of camera movement and the speed of camera movement that Peter is visualizing for one of his shots. Therefore, we do hand-overs from a miniature to a digital environment, or it's a solely digital environment."

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weight to carry for quite a while. I like to think we've been successful in achieving our ultimate goals."

Many people had input into Gollum's design, including concept artist Alan Lee, and producer-writer Fran Walsh. "My philosophy is that a good design can come from everywhere," said Taylor. "On all our characters, including Gollum, in the initial phase, it's thrown totally wide open to anyone's input. In doing so, you get everyone's visualization of what that character looks like."



It is a very successful way to open up the options."

Taylor was reluctant to assign credit because of WETA's collaborative culture, but would go as far as to say that, ultimately, most of the Gollum design was done by two WETA sculptors. "It was the simplest character in some ways and the most complex in others," he continued. "We did over one hundred, three-dimensional sculpted maquettes before we captured the subtle nuances of what we wanted. You've got to appreciate that he is a totally schizophrenic character, so within the one piece of sculpting you've got to be able to convey the subtle facial distortions that will deliver two completely different personalities. That is extremely difficult."

The design of the armor also began quite early and took two-and-a-half years to realize. A "prologue elf" suit, with its violin-shaped shield, exemplified the imaginative designs. Taylor



was cagey about the design influences for the trilogy's armor, but said, "There's a phenomenal influence mostly from nature, as I believe Tolkien was influenced strongly by nature. In the future, I would love to talk more in-depth [about it], but at this point I'd love the audience to see these visual analogies and see what they draw from them." There were also historical references, but here too he was tight-lipped.

Although Dickson designed the costumes, WETA oversaw all the armor (except for the black riders' horses) and weapons.



**SHORT FORM:** By necessity, the by-play in the Council of Elrond (above, right) had to be trimmed to focus on the film's most pressing plot-points. **ABOVE LEFT:** Sean Bean as Boromir, Orlando Bloom as Legolas, and Viggo Mortensen as Aragorn.

Hence, the more armor a character wore, the greater WETA's involvement.

"One of the things that I was adamant about with our designers was that we develop the cultural inheritance of the different characters, so you felt, for instance, that Boromir had thousands of years of lore within his costume, [and] within the graphics on his buckles. Every single actor had a different buckling system relative to their culture, every actor had a different belting system, and so on. It took WETA two-and-a-half years!"

## DIFFERENT LANDS, NEW VISIONS: DESIGNING THE TRILOGY

The project's design work picked up steam in January of 1998, with the arrival of concept artists Alan Lee and John Howe, both renowned for their Tolkien book illustrations. "It was Peter [Jackson] who chose Alan and John from research he had done on illustrators of J.R.R. Tolkien's work," noted production designer Grant Major.

Lee (*LEGEND*, *MERLIN*) described the dynamics of the working relationships at WETA. "We didn't consciously divide up the work. We fell into place fairly naturally. John and I were really there to con-

centrate on the set design more than the creatures, although we both got involved with those discussions. John, in fact, had more involvement with the creatures than I did. He had already done very nice drawings of the Balrog and of the fell-beast [the nazguls' flying steeds]. So some of the designs for those were based quite strongly on John's work."

As for Lee, "My involvement was more with the places, the landscapes, the castles, and the cities." So extensive was his involvement that he painted various sets—including murals in Rivendell—and actually stitched-in grass on the Weathertop set.

The design of the sets—of which there would be over 350—also began quite early, nearly two years before principal photography. Production designer Grant Major, a long-time Jackson collaborator, joined the project at the same time as Lee. His role on *THE LORD OF THE RINGS* was primarily to actualize Lee's and Howe's concepts.

Because the exterior set of Hobbiton had special requirements, construction on it began a full year before production commenced. The community needed to look established, and so grass, garden vegetables, and hedges had to undergo growth cycles ahead of principal photography. The one-quarter-square-mile set was built on a farm north of the production base in Wellington.

"We actually found the landscape together," recalled Lee. "The location scout came up with several options, and then we flew up to Mata Mata, where it was eventu-

ally built. There was a team of us that did a lot of the location scouting, [including] Grant Major and Dan Hennah from the art department.

"We wandered around over these hills, and I sat down in a spot that Peter felt was close to the kind of views that we wanted, and just sketched out very roughly where I thought Hobbit houses would go. [The final set] actually ended up being very, very close to that initial sketch. That's a really nice way of working, to be on a farm miles from anywhere and imagining if you were settling that place—where the road would go and just how it would follow around the contour of that hill and where the best places to build your Hobbit holes would be. That's how it started to develop."

As to his inspiration (besides the location), "It's quite similar, in some ways, to the area that I live in England, in Devon. [It's] all rolling hills and houses that are thatched and tucked into the landscape." The exterior and interior sets for Bag End (Frodo's home), the Green Dragon Inn, and Gandalf's wagon were based on John Howe's concepts.

The relandscaping of Mata Mata was quite extensive. "The Party Field was sort of sloping on our found location, so we had to level that off," related Major, "and we had to fill in a couple of gullies and then put the earth on top of that and sow grass. Then we had cut all the roads and cut the fronts of the Hobbit houses into the ground. We had to create some other hills to put the Hobbit holes into.... We actually employed the New Zealand army to do the earthworks and to build the access road, which was at least a mile long, to get into the site."

He added, "The big oak tree that's above Bag End was actually built from scratch. We had to concrete-in a big steel



**“We found a cow that was the biggest cow in New Zealand. It kept growing and growing until it got to be about the size of a large car.”**

**—Production Designer Grant Major**

structure, and then we went and found various oak trees which we cut up and re-assembled around the big, steel structure. We imported container-loads of oak leaves from China. We had a bunch of people to wire them on. It took weeks of work to do that.”

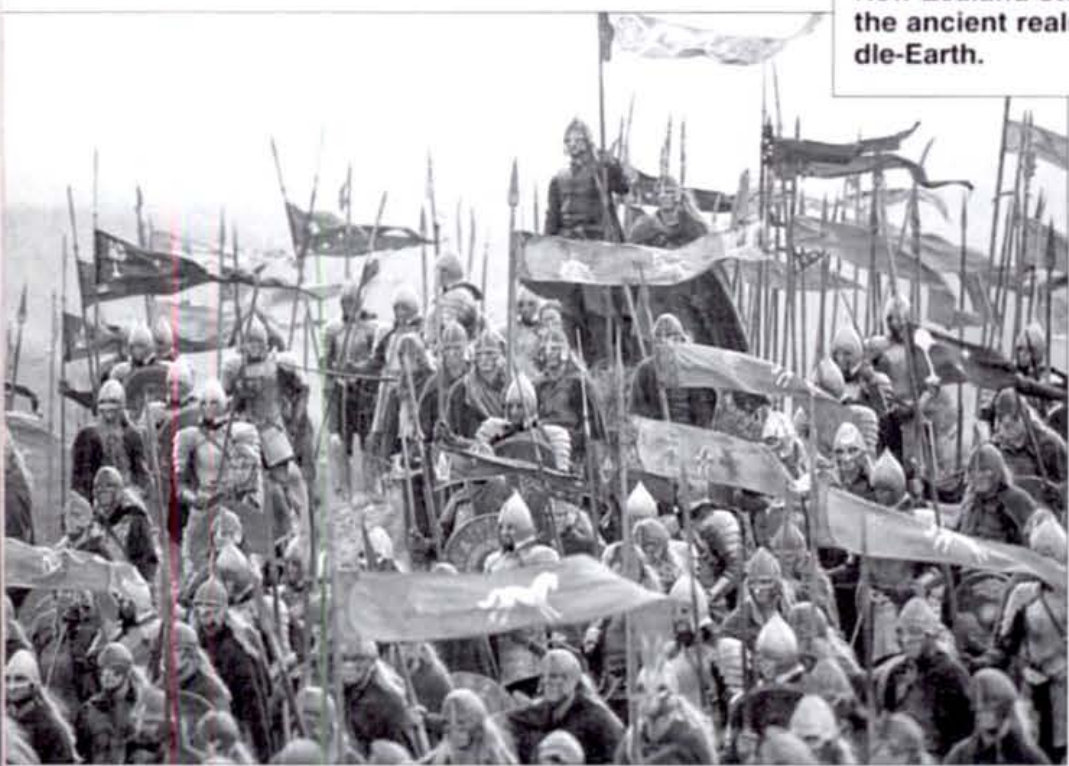
Although much of Hobbiton was appropriately diminutive, parts of it, such as #3 Bagshot Row, were built oversized, so that the human-sized actors playing Hobbits would appear small. As production drew nearer, special livestock was sought to populate these areas. “We were looking for oversized animals,” Major continued. “We did find a cow that was the biggest cow in New Zealand, probably one of the biggest ones in the Southern Hemisphere. It kept growing and growing and got to be about the size of a large car [laughter]. We found that although it was huge, its ankles never grew, so it couldn’t walk very well and was not able to be transported to the site.” Ultimately, a suitably large cow was found. Also, “we did end up with a lot of oversized rabbits, chickens, dogs, and what have you.”

The interior of Bag End was erected and filmed at Stone Street Studios in Wellington. “John [Howe] was basing his concept drawings on the book illus-

of Frodo (Elijah Wood). Major discussed the practicalities of building the same set in two scales. “Probably the trickiest part to build in scale was the tree roots that grew through the roof and formed part of the entrance hall. These tree roots were sculpted free-form by a sculptor and had to be made in two different scales.... You couldn’t mathematically reduce these free-form root shapes, so those were particularly difficult and time-consuming to reproduce twice. Everything else was just furniture-making in different scales—even though we chose different wood grains to get different scales of wood—and printing the fabrics that covered some of the furniture in different scales.... We had carpets made big and small, and of course the weaves were at different scales as well!”

Considering the scope of THE LORD OF THE RINGS, there were surprisingly few unused set designs, but Major recalled one: “There’s a place called Farmer Maggot’s farm between Hobbiton and Bree. We had done concept drawings for [it], and we were just in the throes of whipping them up architecturally before a new script came out that wrote that part out.”

**CLAIMING THE LAND:**  
Director Jackson’s native New Zealand stood in for the ancient realm of Middle-Earth.



trations, which he had done [and] which Peter was very keen on,” explained Major. “Given that it was one of the earliest sets we designed, I actually did the architectural drafting of that myself. So I can lay claim to some of the design of that.”

The set was actually built twice: a diminutive version was used for scenes with the human-sized Gandalf (McKellen), and an oversized version served for shots

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just as they’re making off into the woods.” Lee was philosophical about the scene’s omission.

For Bree, a town where Hobbits and humans interact, Lee again was very influential. “It was quite a sizeable set,” he recalled. “It was built on a disused army base at Fort Dorset, quite close to the studio. There were a couple of streets lined with houses, including the Prancing Pony. It included about ten buildings, and there was a little marketplace. We see it very indistinctly in the rain at night. All the walls and timbers had kind of a gnarled and bent character. Then there was the entrance to Bree, the gatehouse, which was built on another site. There’s a scene where the camera cranes up over the gatehouse, and you see a Hobbit walking through a field. That’s the original plate, and then we added a matte painting of the township of Bree into that.”

He continued, “A lot of these places—in the Shire and Bree—are not that dissimilar from the England that I know. There are pubs in Devon that are similar to the Prancing Pony. There’s one I’m going to tonight, actually, called the Drewe Arms, which served as the model for the concept. It’s a very ancient pub.”

For an ensuing scene where Strider and the Hobbits encounter stone trolls, WETA built statues twelve- to fifteen-feet tall for use on an interior set. The trolls’ positions were based on a book illustration by Lee and his ensuing sketches, but the trolls themselves were designed by WETA sculptors. Lee added a rusting cauldron to the scene.

Rivendell, the elven home of Elrond, was depicted with an elaborate miniature, as well as sets. While the miniature was made in early 1998, though, the shot into which it would be inserted was not completed until summer, 2001. Finding an appropriate, live-action plate proved daunting: Autumnal trees were desired, as the elves are in the autumn of their years, but such trees are hard to find in New Zealand. “We did talk about trying to shoot down in Arrowtown and Queenstown...” recalled Richard Taylor, “[but] we actually ended up building them as miniatures and compositing them in.” Lee elaborated: “In the end, it’s a combination of lots of different things: a matte painting, photographic tiles, the miniature, and waterfall elements which were taken from various waterfalls around New Zealand [on the South Island]. But it really feels like it’s one very distinctive, beautiful place.” Taylor called the finished product a “Frankenstein shot” be-



cause the elements were digitally stitched together.

"We built quite a lovely set," remarked Lee. "It was one of those places that people wanted to visit all the time. A couple of people got married there. It had a very magical feel to it. It [was used] mainly for the exteriors, and for Frodo's bedroom, which had a very indoor-outdoor feel. The whole [idea] with Rivendell is that the elves live in a very open kind of architecture where there's no glass. You just kind of walk through arcades, and nature is kind of allowed to grow inside the buildings—the buildings sort of envelop nature. It's really the kind of place where I would like to live myself."

Another major undertaking for Lee was the ancient dwarf mines of Moria, which was depicted with models, sets, partial sets, and CG. The exterior of Moria's west entrance was built as a "wet set" on a backlot in the Hutt Valley. It consisted of a lake, a dilapidated bridge, and artificial holly trees. Wider shots were achieved by compositing the actors into a model—one of the larger models built for the trilogy. This was a case where J.R.R. Tolkien's art was used as reference. "He did a very nice drawing of the doorway," noted Lee. "We just changed it a little bit. You'll recognize the design."

Moria's first chamber was a set. "It had a forced-perspective element in it," he revealed. "There was a flight of steps that went up from the entranceway, [which] receded in size as they went further back into the studio. You had the impression that you were looking up several hundred feet into darkness, whereas it was merely forty feet."

The design of a following area, the Cemetery Stairs, exemplified the collaboration between Peter Jackson and Lee. "The idea of putting in tombs of dwarves alongside the passageways was something that kind of cropped up while I was doodling," said Lee. "It seemed like a nice touch. I wanted to give it the kind of feeling of the Appian Way on the way into Rome, which is lined with tombs. So I had done some drawings of these quite elaborate tombs, which have been pillaged and broken. Peter liked the idea, but then he had the notion of putting them along the side of this very high and monumental staircase. [Lee originally had the tombs lining a shaft.] It almost feels like the steps on the pyramids."

Moria's other exterior, the Dimrill Dale Gate, was filmed on a mountain top at the Abel Tasman National Park. "Even though the story has the door coming out of the side of a mountain, we actually went to the top of a mountain and simulated the mountain continuing up with CG," explained

**WORLD AT HOME:** The environs of Rivendell were designed to express the elven sense of unity with nature.



Major. "There were particularly remarkable granite peaks that were chosen. The crew and cast were helicoptered up to the top of this mountain, and it was shot over a couple of days up there, including motion-control camera work."

Major explained that building the doors would have been impractical, as the Department of Conservation would have objected and wind could have blown the structures down the mountain. "The doorway itself [and the cliffs surrounding it] will be CG, so they just stepped out of an imaginary door."

Lothlorien, home of tree-dwelling elves, was especially challenging from a design standpoint. "It was quite a tricky one, because it had to feel so magical and wonderful," commented Lee. "There are these buildings high up in these huge trees. There were a lot of different elements that went into producing that. There were several miniatures, matte paintings, and quite a large set, which took the trees up to a height of about twenty feet. The girth of the trees at the base

was something like twenty to twenty-four feet.... [It's] a place for elves who are completely at home in nature. We see them in the background, just walking across these bridges which are high up in the trees. They don't care that there's a drop of several hundred feet to the forest."

For the fellowship's river journey, Lee designed elven boats for use on location at Te Anau. However, "we had a boat builder who constructed them, [and] they...had to build in some buoyancy areas at the front and the back, so I can't claim

**RECYCLING IN MIDDLE-EARTH:** A redress of a craft used for forced-perspective photography became Galadriel's swan boat.





complete credit for the look of the boat.... The essence is the same." Like the Bag End set, the boat was built in different scales: one proportioned to the human-sized characters; and another built oversized for the Hobbits. The production found additional use for the latter. Lee: "We actually took one of those boats and transformed it into Galadriel's boat by designing an elegant swan neck and ornate features."

While the sets were being developed, WETA continued to work on the armor. "John Howe has an incredible understanding of medieval armor and weapons," enthused Richard Taylor. "So he brought that huge wealth of knowledge to our facility and assisted in tutoring our technicians in the processes necessary to make the items."

Taylor himself devised a way of creating chain mail. "They wanted to have realistic chain mail," said Mark Ordesky, "but if you made real chain mail, it would be so heavy you couldn't move. So they innovated this little machine: Richard Taylor grew up on a farm in New Zealand—there was this black, narrow pipe that they would use for irrigation. He invented this machine that could take hundreds and hundreds of yards of this pipe and chop it like a really fast, machine-gun guillotine. It chopped up tiny, tiny pieces of [plastic] chain mail, which would then be painted into this metallic color.... There were people that literally knitted the chain mail: They would take all these rings and knit them together. You would go into the workshop, and there would be these two guys just sitting there linking the rings together!"

Special attention was also given to the weapons. The swords wielded by the actors in close-ups were real. "Because they wanted absolute authenticity, they set up a forge in WETA in the old-fashioned way," Ordesky continued. "I'm talking about plate steel being so hot it's orange and being on an anvil with a hammer.... Bang! Bang! Bang! They were literally hammering it out like people did a thousand years ago!"

The stunt swords were aluminum. To prevent breakage, Taylor devised shock absorbers: "Whenever the aluminum would strike," Ordesky explained, "the shock wave would travel down the aluminum blade and get absorbed into this rubber inside the hilt."

Lee also had influence on character design. With Gandalf, he had input into the hair and beard. Also, "I modeled the prototype of Gandalf's nose extension. It wasn't the one that was finally used, but it was quite close.... It was Peter's idea to actually give Ian [McKellen] an extra touch on the end of his nose. I guess it was to make him look like the archetypal wizard."

Lee designed the wizard's staff. "We tried looking for bits of natural wood.

There's quite a good supply of driftwood on the beaches around Wellington, so we got in some pieces of that. We were looking for something kind of gnarled and interesting, but there wasn't anything that was quite right. So I just started sketching. It wasn't until fairly close to the time that we needed it that I really focused on it. I came up with an interesting shape for the end of the staff. We had also been making a variety of pipes for all the Hobbits, Gandalf, and Strider, and it just struck me that one of those would look very nice as part of that staff. So I just shaped the roots to accommodate his pipe. Ian [McKellen] loved the idea.

"There were three staves—he loses one at Orthanc, and the next one when he fights the Balrog. The third staff is more polished and impressive-looking."

### SPRUNG FROM THE PAGES: THE STORY COMES TO LIFE

In casting the film, both Peter Jackson and New Line agreed that it was more important that the performers vanish into their roles. After some initiative on his part, Elijah Wood won the role of Frodo. In 1989, the young actor made his movie debut in *BACK TO THE FUTURE II* as a boy trying to work an antique video game. He has fond memories of working with Michael J. Fox and exploring the set of *Hill Valley, 2015*, on breaks. In 1999, his agent notified him about the casting of *THE LORD OF THE RINGS*. Because Pe-

Western Costume in the valley and grabbed a few 'Hobbit' items of clothing and some 'orc armor.' My friends George, Mike, and I headed out to the Hollywood Hills and shot the exterior scenes and then shot an interior scene at my house. That night, we headed to the Miramax offices and borrowed an Avid to edit the tape. The next day I dropped the tape off at [casting director] Victoria Burrows's office. I felt like I had given it my all and hoped for the best. I heard that the tape was well-received, and eventually I met with Peter and Fran in L.A. and read for them again.... The scenes I read to get the role were Frodo greeting Gandalf upon his return to Bag End; a scene from film three where Frodo has lost all sense of himself and memory of things that he loves; and a scene in which a fatigued and ring-burdened Frodo discards his orc armor disguise and finds new strength."

Production began on October 11, 1999. The unprecedented simultaneous filming of three movies was unique for everyone, including Wood. "[It required] us to [consider] out-of-sequence [production



ter Jackson was interviewing actors abroad, Wood opted to send him a video-taped audition. "The idea of reading scenes in front of a video camera against a white wall didn't interest me," he said. "I thought that I would better convey my passion for the film and the role of Frodo by making my own tape. So after a few sessions with a dialect coach for an English accent, I went to

schedules] in terms of entire films," he observed. "We began by shooting scenes from film one, primarily. When we encountered weather problems a few months into shooting, we were forced to head to cover set, which meant filming scenes from film three. I was lulled into a false sense of security, slightly, thinking that I wouldn't have to focus on my character's later plight



for a while. Sean Astin [Samwise], Peter, and I had in-depth conversations to explore where our characters would be at this point in the story."

On the technical end, Wood enjoyed the depth-deception techniques for Hobbit-sizing, which were "immediate and believable." For example, "there's a scene in Bag End where Frodo and Gandalf are sitting across from each other engaged in conversation about Bilbo's ring. I sat far down the table that was rigged with the camera moves, and Ian sat closer to the camera, but due to the angle, it looked as if we were di-

these films," he said, "and I really accepted Peter's style of adaptation from the page to the screen. He had to be boss, anyway—I knew this from having co-scripted the screen version of Shakespeare's play, *Richard III*. Simply, Peter wants the audience to believe that everything they see on-screen actually happened. We were all fortunate that his camera was there to record it. Like all the actors, I wanted him to be happy. Occasionally we disagreed about how to play a line. We always



rectly across from one another. The only drawback to this trick and others was that we couldn't look at the actors we were playing opposite. Such drawbacks were easily gotten over as such techniques [as] blue screen became the norm, but [were] no less fascinating for us."

More troublesome were the Hobbit feet. Application often began at 5:00 A.M., and the process could take ninety minutes, with him standing much of the time. "First the prosthetics were glued to my feet and painted on the sides to blend with my own skin," he explained, "and then wig lace was applied." The feet tended to slip off near the end of the day, and they fell apart whenever the Hobbits ran downhill or on unsolid ground. They could also be punctured by sharp objects. "There were injuries. Sean Astin, in one scene that had him run into a lake, stepped on a sharp stick that [cut] his foot pretty badly. Look for footage of that on the DVD—our video diarist was present."

Cast as Gandalf was Ian McKellen (*X-MEN*). Like much of the cast, he praised Peter Jackson for his openness to sugges-

tions. "I hadn't read Tolkien much before compromised by Peter shooting his version and then mine—in that order. I wonder if I shall be able to identify which one makes it into the director's cut?" McKellen claimed to have creative input, "every day, every scene, and every line of Gandalf throughout thirteen months on the job. But then that's acting."

As for the lengthy production schedule, "It was long—as long as a full year. The seasons came and went, and I discovered life in New Zealand is a little blessed. It was the job of a lifetime. I was obviously less aware than the wary director how each scene fitted into the storyline of each separate movie, but he always reminded us. The Gandalf scenes were filmed roughly in sequence—thank you, Peter."

In the book, Gandalf demonstrates reverence for nature (e.g., his concern about bothering plants while trying to enter Moria). This survived the translation but in different forms. "Gandalf talks to a moth, but he leaves the leaves and flowers alone. In clothes, appearance, and bearing, we wanted him to belong to the soil of Middle-Earth, always remembering he is a

temporary, long-stay visitor."

Were many liberties taken with the character? "I consulted the novels daily, but first and last was the screenplay. I worked to be true to that version of the character. Many of Gandalf's words were left for the audience to discover on the page. But I should be disappointed if anyone felt we had taken liberties with his essence."

Production officially wrapped on December 22, 2000, however, the actors' jobs were not over. Among other things, much of the dialogue had to be looped because of on-set noise. "It can be frustrating," remarked Wood, "especially since each delivery is reliant on the moment during the scene filmed on that

particular day. That said, I actually enjoyed re-recording my dialogue for film one, because I was given a chance to improve some accent mishaps that may have occurred, and I could explore different performances, trying different things as I had a new perspective on the scenes."

History has shown that it is impossible to make a film that can please everyone, and some Tolkien purists will inevitably feel unsatisfied by *THE LORD OF THE RINGS*. However, Richard Taylor advised all who see the film to "enjoy the movie for what it is: Peter Jackson's adaptation of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. Once you've watched the movies, if you don't feel you've been completely fulfilled, reinvigorate yourself with the books.

"In some places it's going to possibly surpass the books. But at the end of the day, there will always be the books—they're timeless.... The film will stand alone as its own piece of artwork." **CFQ**

**EXTENDING THE STORY: FELLOWSHIP** fills in the missing gaps in the romance between Aragorn (Viggo Mortensen, upper right) and Arwen (Liv Tyler, far left). **ABOVE:** An onslaught of uruk-hai.



# THE LORD OF THE RINGS

## THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING

# Peter Jackson

## *Being True to Tolkien: The New Zealand Director Honors a Literary Classic*

By Ross Plesset

When THE LORD OF THE RINGS trilogy is completed in 2003, it will have consumed seven-plus years of Peter Jackson's life. What appeals to him so strongly about J.R.R. Tolkien's saga? "It's a great story fit in a genre that I really like. When I was about twelve years old, I saw the original KING KONG on TV, and it was what I love in

movies. It took you into an amazing world that you had never experienced in real life with incredible creatures and dinosaurs, and it was a really emotional story. When I saw KING KONG, I fell in love with the idea of making films.

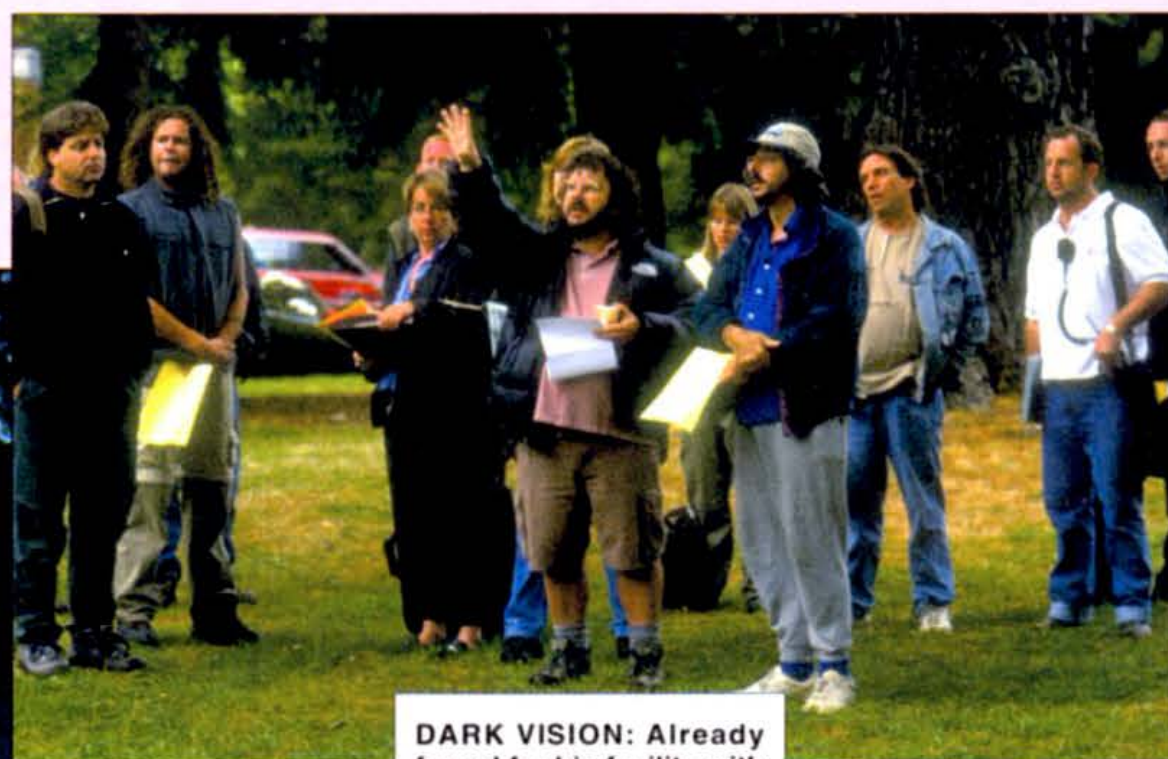
"I loved the Ray Harryhausen movies in my teenage years—I made a Cyclops and did some really rough stop motion animation. So I sort of grew up with a love for that type of world and that type of story. THE LORD OF THE

into the script such as Tom Bombadil, some hard decisions had to be made. "What we did contemplate," Jackson recalled, "and it was really for the fans, was to have the hobbits walking through the Old Forest and to see a feathered cap come dart-

ing through the trees, to hear the sound of Tom Bombadil's voice and song and then have the hobbits turn and run away as fast as they could! [He laughed] We thought [that] would acknowledge Tom Bombadil in an affectionate-joke kind of way. We didn't have time to do it."

While the filmmakers could not translate the incidents and dialogue verbatim, they tried to be loyal to Tolkien's written descriptions. Renowned Tolkien illustrators John Howe and Alan Lee visu-

alized the written concepts and fleshed out ones that were left vague (e.g., Moria). Said Jackson, "At the very beginning of the process, when we knew that we had the rights secured and we were free to start work on the script, we did a big sweep through the world [of Middle-Earth]. We tried to find every available piece of artwork. I had a few of the calendars—but not all of [them]—going back twenty to twenty-five years. We tried to get all of the calendars, we tried to get all of the different editions of the book that had illustrations. We just went on this big hunt for imagery that artists had created over the last thirty years... [This was



**DARK VISION:** Already famed for his facility with dark fantasy, Peter Jackson takes on his biggest challenge yet with LORD OF THE RINGS. **ABOVE:** The director on location.

RINGS is the ultimate example of a fantastical story and a world full of imagination and good emotional parts."

In adapting the book to the screen, Jackson and his co-writers had to walk a fine line between pleasing the fans and maintaining a film structure. To include every event in THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING, Jackson estimated it would have taken nearly five hours of screen time. So when it came to incorporating an incidental yet highly popular character



done] mainly on the net, at various options, and [through] book dealers.

"Alan Lee and John Howe were the two artists whose work really felt good to us. Alan Lee's watercolors we loved because they felt real; they weren't Heavy Metal-orientated, they weren't overly-fantasy. We didn't really want to make the film too fantastical; we wanted to make it have an historical feel. We also loved the moodiness of his painting and his depictions of a lot of the places. We loved the painting of the fellowship in Dwar-rowdelf, with the huge columns [and] these tiny people. We thought, *Wow, if we could put this sort of imagery on a film, it would be fantastic!*

"John Howe's work we loved, again, because [of] the sense of history and reality. Also, John's brilliant at doing illustrations that feel like a freeze-frame in a film... You've got this job of making the film of *THE LORD OF THE RINGS*, and you look at Gandalf standing outside Bag End as depicted by John Howe, and you go, 'Wow, this is exactly what we want in the film! We can't improve on this.' We spent nearly a year working on the scripts with all these illustrations around being very much inspired by Alan and John's work. After a long period of time, we thought, 'Well, rather than just being inspired by what they've done, wouldn't it be wonderful if they actually worked on the film?' And so we tracked them down.

"Their collaboration was great, and it was very, very free of any egos. They're both incredibly nice guys. We [might have] said to them, 'Okay, why don't we do some sketches of Bag End?' They would both do their own sketches of Bag End, and we would look at them and say, 'Well, we love the doorway that John drew, and Alan drew a fantastic window.' So, we [would use] the window from Alan's drawing and the door from John's drawing. It was a very collaborative process."

From the time Jackson conceived of the project, he knew he wanted to cast adult-sized people as hobbits and somehow "shrink" them, rather than cast-

ing little people. "I didn't think that little people were what Tolkien was actually writing about. He described the hobbits as people that were about four-feet-tall, with big, hairy feet. When I read *The Lord of the Rings*, I never imagine little people with little proportions as Frodo and Bilbo. I'm imagining something very different. So I didn't think it was accurate to cast the film in that way."

Downsizing the humans was an intricate integration of techniques, including forced-perspective, which necessitated extensive storyboarding. However, despite all this pre-planning, Jackson was quite spontaneous on the set. "I love visual effects. Every film I've ever made has had a lot of effects, so I'm very comfortable with [them]. I'm not afraid of them, and I'm reasonably good at coming up with ideas of how to do these shots, and obviously other people are as well. Therefore, whilst we did storyboard everything to begin with, so that we had a plan, we had total flexibility on the set.

"As we would rehearse the scenes with actors and come up with different ideas for camera shots, we were all so well tuned-in to how these shots were going to be done, it was very easy just to change the plans at the last minute. Say we were going to do a blue-screen comp of Gandalf coming in through the door, but [then] we wanted to have Gandalf sitting in the chair instead, because that's what [we'd] discussed with Ian McKellen. Therefore, we would have changed our camera angle—so suddenly the storyboards changed—but it was simple because we knew what we were doing and we knew how we could do it.

"[With] the forced-perspective, occasionally we had very

**NO SMALL EFFORT:** Art house crowds are well familiar with Jackson's skill at melding B-movie weirdness with classic, cinematic style. Now, New Line will help introduce the director to multiplex audiences.



complicated moving rigs that had to be built in advance. With those, we would talk to the ac-

tors the day before, discuss the shot, and get the input from the actors. So we knew exactly how we wanted to do it, which may well have been different from the storyboards. The forced-perspective rig was for when we were moving the camera, and it involved motion control platforms slaved together with the camera [and] computers. That rig would then be built during the night, so when we came in the next day it would be ready to shoot. It was always done with the actors' involvement."

One would think that forced-perspective shots such as this would contain funny and unusual bloopers, but surprisingly, Jackson could not point to any. Like the cast, he cited the actors' eyelines as the main challenge, especially in shots where either the camera or an actor moved.

Many people on the project praised Jackson for his superhuman stamina in helming three films simultaneously. How did he do it? "Your body and your brain have a way of pacing yourself. It's an interesting phenomenon, really, and it's very psychological. I've made movies that I shot in twelve weeks, and by the end of the shoot you're exhausted, you have no more energy, you're ready to fall down and sleep for three days. Then I shot *THE FRIGHTENERS*, where we

shot for six months, and at the end of six months I was ready to sleep for three days. On these films, we shot for nearly fifteen months [laughed], and by the time we were at the end, I was ready to fall down with exhaustion and sleep for three days. In a way, your brain and your body just pace themselves. You go into the movie knowing that in twelve weeks time, this is not going to be over, in twelve weeks time you still have over a year to go. Somehow that just dictates how your body reacts.

"It's all very psychological. It's interesting—for me, the process was simply one in which I woke up in the morning, got in the car, drove to the studio, and shot a film. I did that for fifteen months.

"What amazes me is how smoothly the shoot went, which I think is certainly a tribute to Barrie Osborne, our producer... The logistics of it were staggering, and that didn't really involve me so much. I'm like the calm center of the hurricane... In a sense, it was the smoothest film I've ever been on, which is interesting because it's probably the most complicated film production of all time. Nobody's ever shot three films back-to-back."

Once this project is behind him, Jackson hopes to return to small, "guerilla-style" films *a la* *BAD TASTE* and *FORGOTTEN SILVER*. In the long-term, he wants to alternate between small and large projects. One of the big movies, he hopes, will be *KING KONG*. CFQ



# MONSTERS, INC.

## *This is What Happens When the Darkest of Childhood Nightmares are Given 401k Plans*

By Lawrence French

**M**ONSTERS, INC. will mark something of a departure for Pixar in that it will be the studio's first film not to be directed by John Lasseter, who is instead taking the less-demanding role of executive producer. Taking up the directing reigns will be Pete Docter, the talented co-author and supervising animator on the first TOY STORY.

"With MONSTERS, INC., I've been there from the very beginning," explained Lasseter, "and I'm involved in all the different aspects of the film. But it's very important to me that Pete Docter is seen as the director, along with David Silverman and Lee Unkrich as his co-directors."

It was shortly after TOY STORY opened in 1995 that Pete Docter began envisioning ideas for the movie, which he always hoped he'd be able to direct. "I was thinking along the lines of how everyone could identify with TOY STORY," said Docter, "and how easy it was for people to imagine their toys coming to life. So I thought, *What else is*

*there like that, where you have a shared childhood experience?* Well, when I was a kid, I thought of how I was always so sure there were monsters in my closet, or under my bed at night, and I just ran with that idea."

Indeed, the universality of monsters lurking under a child's bed has been the basis for many other films and stories, including Tobe Hooper's POLTERGEIST and Richard Matheson's classic "Little Girl Lost" episode of THE TWILIGHT ZONE. Strangely enough, it was also the basis for one of John Lasseter's earliest short films, NITEMARE. "Both ideas come from the same place," explained Lasseter, "in the sense that they take off from the familiarity we had as kids, of the monsters who were hiding in your room, but it was not the genesis of MONSTERS, INC. It was funny, though, because as soon as I saw Pete's idea, I thought of my short film, NITEMARE. But it certainly wasn't a case of Pete saying, 'Let's take the idea that was in John's student film and make it in-

to a feature.'"

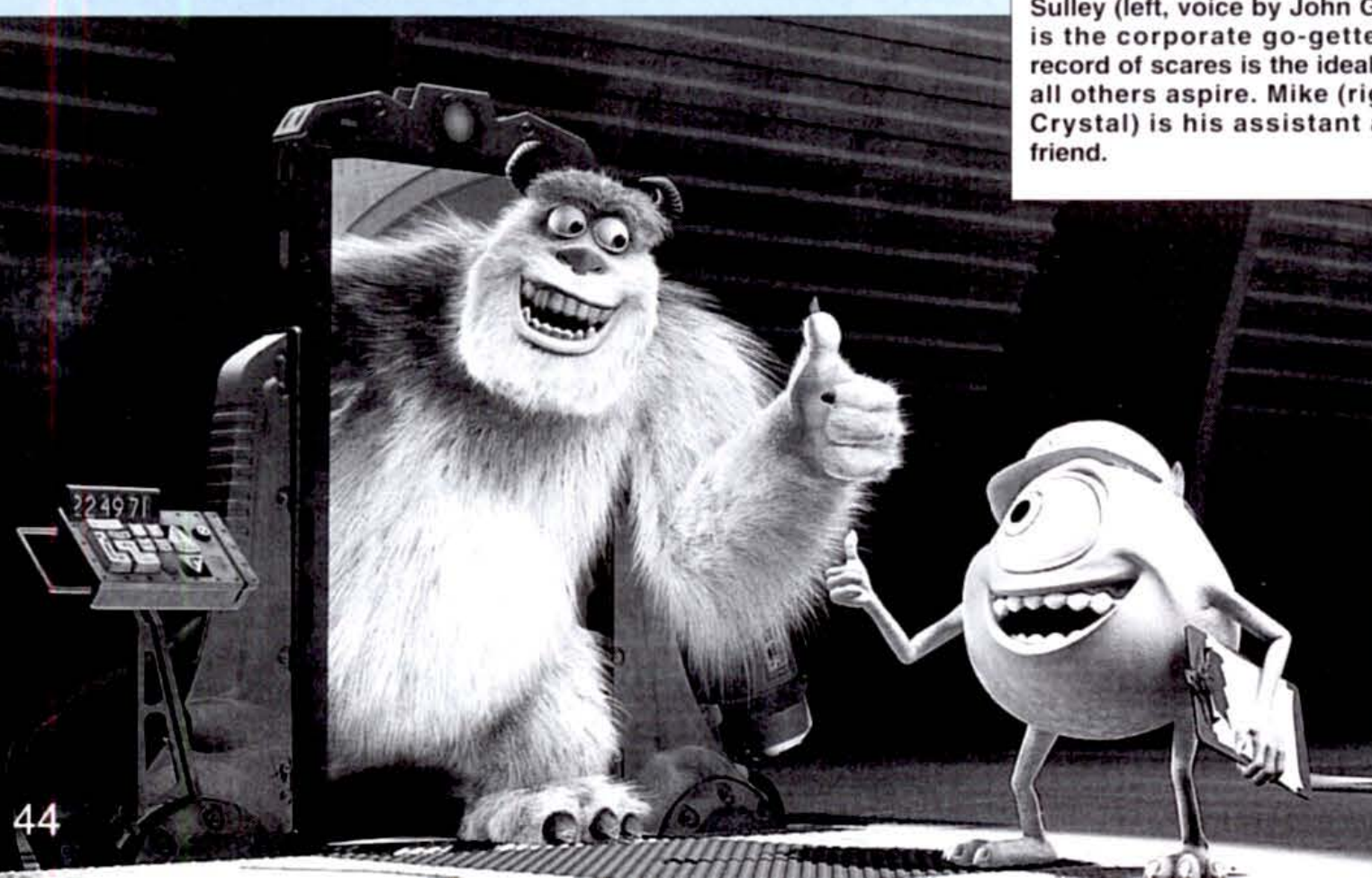
"Initially, it started out more as an entertainment concept," said Docter, "where there are monsters who go in and scare kids while other monsters would watch the kids being scared, like an all-star wrestling match or some other sports event. From there it quickly developed into a workplace setting."

Clearly, a world populated by monsters would be a natural for computer animation, just as bugs, dinosaurs, and toys have been in the past. And MONSTERS, INC.—with its setting of 'Monstropolis,' a thriving, other-dimensional factory town populated entirely by odd creatures—promises to bring us monsters of all shapes and sizes. But in creating this alternate world, Lasseter was careful to emphasize what he called, "the foundation with the audience."

He continued: "You want to have some aspect of the movie that is familiar. Then you can take it and make it into something new, that the audience has never seen before. In MONSTERS, INC., it's taking the notion that when you were a kid, in the darkness of your room at night, you think there's something hiding in your closet. You think that pile of dirty clothes in the corner is moving, and is actually alive, or there's something right outside of your door that's ready to scare you. So we take that idea and have fun with it by showing you that, yes, there are monsters that come out of the closet to scare you, but there's a whole reason why that you never knew about."

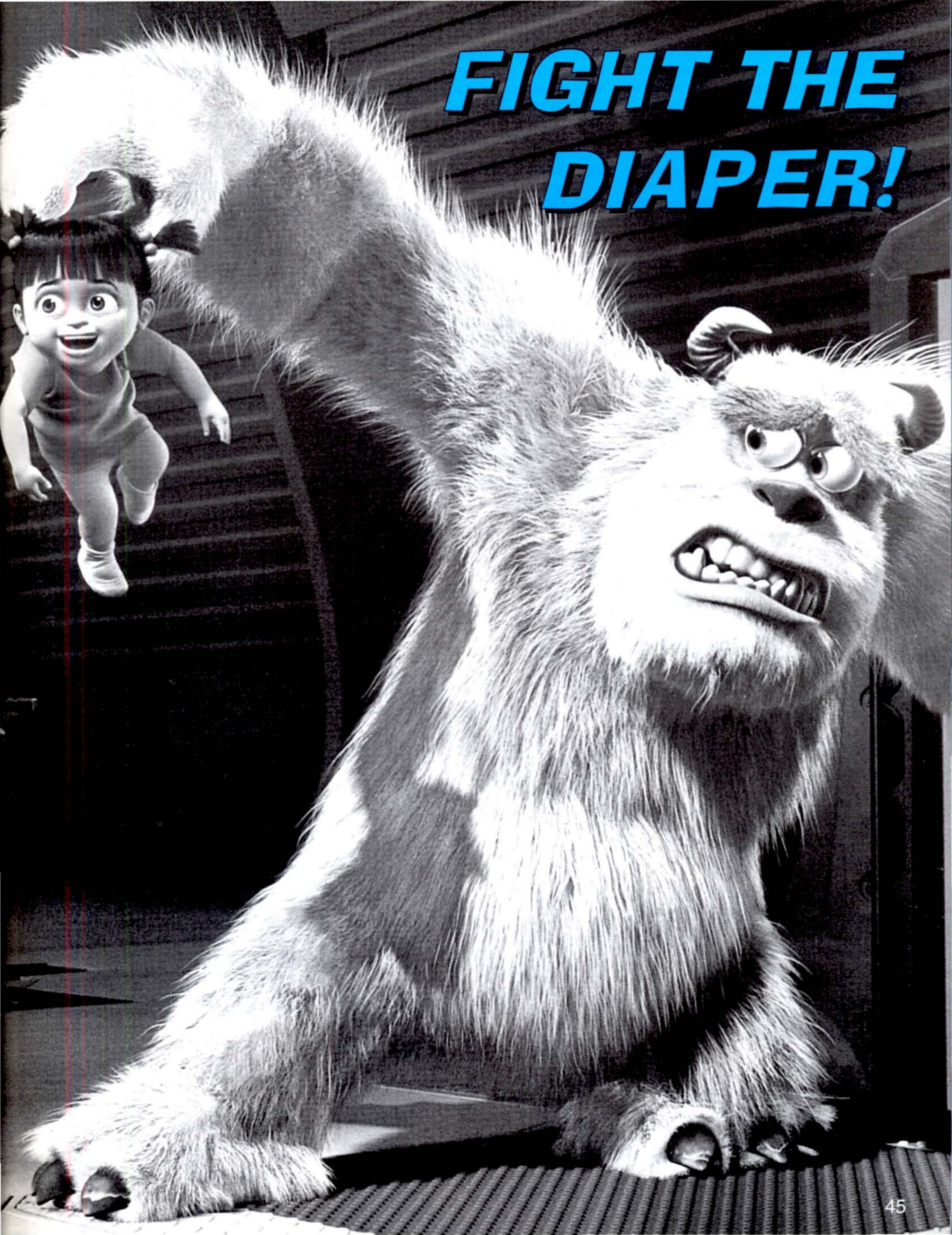
"We start with the premise of monsters coming out of kids' closets, and take it and bring it into a corporate world, a world that's having an energy crisis. Adults in the audience will look at the corporate side of it and laugh,

**GLENGARRY GLEN YAAAAHHH!:** Sulley (left, voice by John Goodman) is the corporate go-getter whose record of scares is the ideal to which all others aspire. Mike (right, Billy Crystal) is his assistant and best friend.





# ***FIGHT THE DIAPER!***





because the monsters have that, too. There's a CEO who's worried about his board of directors and his stock price; there's a receptionist; there's the middle management. It's a similar kind of thing to what we have in the real world."

One early story hurdle that needed to be overcome was why monsters needed to scare kids, and how it would work in a believable way. Lasseter explained the process by which an extrapolation out of the basic idea solved the problem: "We came up with the idea that monsters have been around a long time, and they've discovered that the screams of human children are a power source for them, like a fossil fuel. They have factories to gather the screams and then refine it into power. Everything in their world that needs to be powered comes from children's screams. In analyzing that, we decided that Monsters, Inc. would be the main 'scream factory' in their world, [a company that] had been founded by the grandfather of the current CEO, Henry J. Waternoose. The

Inc., and they expanded tremendously. But now, there's an energy shortage because there are no longer as many kids in the human world, and they grow up much faster. Nowadays, by six years old, they're not scared any more, because of reality TV, video games, the Internet, and all the rest. The doors become useless, and have to be discarded."

Out of all the monsters at Monsters Inc., the top kid-scarer is Sullivan (or Sulley, voiced by John Goodman), an eight-foot-tall, bear-like creature with horns, claws, a tail, and blue fur. Sulley's best friend and scare-assistant is Mike Wazowski (Billy Crystal), a basketball-shaped, lime-colored creature with one huge eyeball and spindly, frog-like legs. Together, they face a crisis when they accidentally allow into the monster world a little human girl, Boo, who, like Maria in *FRANKENSTEIN*, isn't afraid of a monster just because of its appearance. "We played around with the idea of a little boy as well," explained Docter. "But for me, the big draw was that Sullivan

kind of gibberish that seems completely natural, but she doesn't quite talk yet—it's like a kid who is just on the cusp of language. She has lines where you get the general gist of it, but you don't actually know what she's saying, which makes her even more dependent on Sullivan. If she was running around alone, no one would be able to understand her." Added Lasseter, "Boo is really wonderful, true and special, and it's really kid-like, although it's not talking down to kids."

Pixar's star screenwriter (and co-director of *A BUG'S LIFE*), Andrew Stanton, was brought in to shape the early drafts of the script. He especially liked the idea of using a little girl as the heroine of the story. "Regardless of what is the truth," noted Stanton, "people think that a little girl is going to be more frightened of monsters than a little boy. But anyone who has kids knows there's no rhyme or reason to something like that, although it's a kind of universal perception.

"We tried to direct her, but it was quite hard. So we gave her a lot of sugar items and then followed her around with a microphone."

—Director Pete Docter on Two-Year-Old Voice Actress Mary Gibbs

grandfather discovered a technology that uses a door which you can activate that leads you into a closet in a little kid's bedroom.

"We kept refining that idea: In the late '40s and early '50s, along came the baby boom in the human world, so there was a massive explosion in the number of children out there to scare. Back then, times were a little more innocent, so monsters could scare kids way into their teens. Not only were there a lot more doors to kids' bedrooms, but the monsters were able to use those doors for many years—it was a real boom-time for the energy companies in the monster world, especially Monsters,

develops parental feelings for Boo, and as such, I wanted to create as big a contrast as possible between the two. So you have this huge, manly, furry monster, and you have this cute little girl. That's why we pushed for a girl.

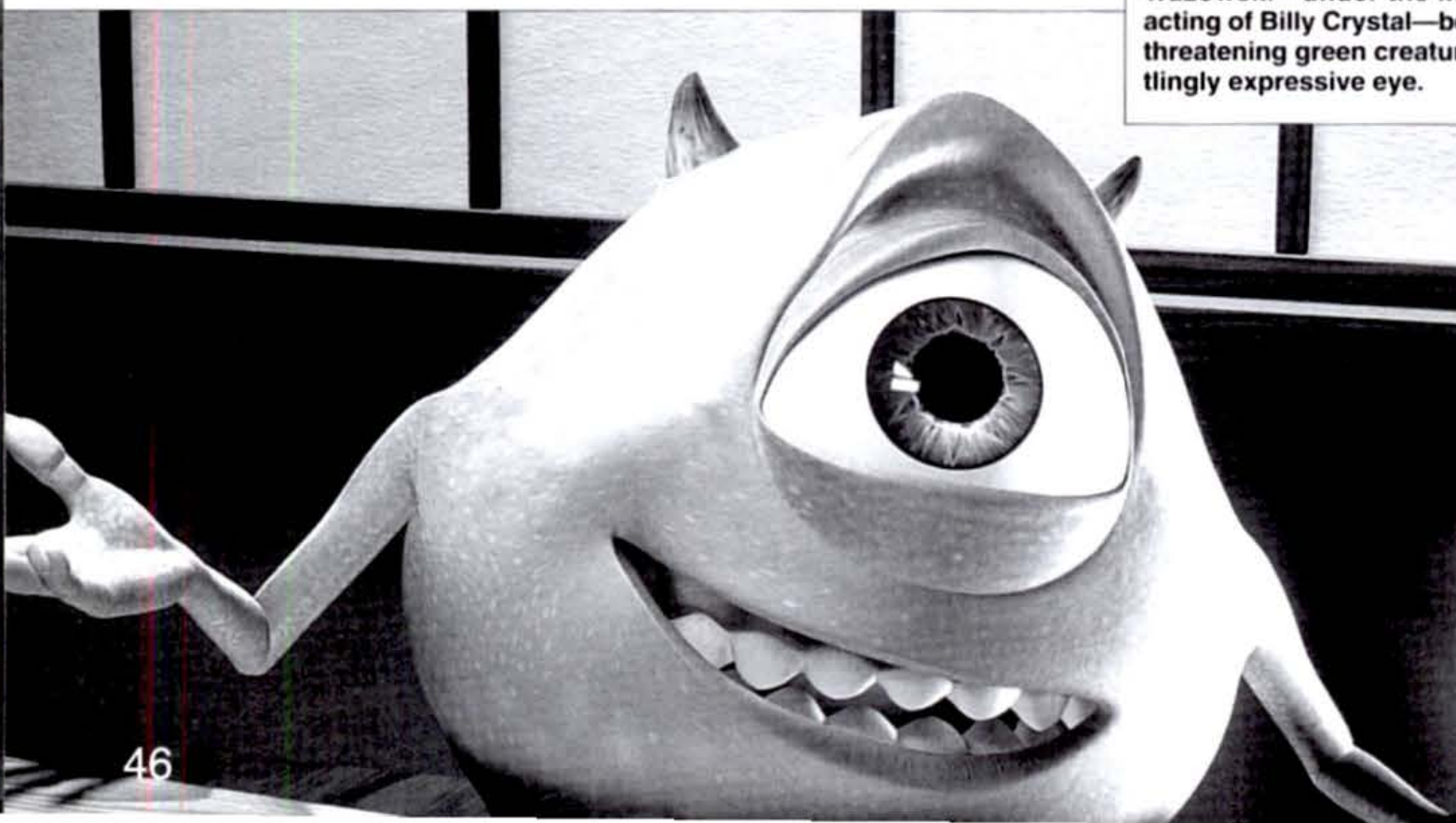
"Initially, we had Boo as a spunky six-year old who was sort of wise beyond her age, but as the story developed, it became clearer what her part was and we pushed her younger and younger to make her more innocent, more helpless, and more dependent on Sullivan. She also doesn't speak any words that you can understand. She talks a

It was also because it allowed us to come from opposite ends, by one more degree: We felt it would be more entertaining to see a little girl—rather than a little boy—who could stand on her own, and not be frightened by a big scary beast. Also, because of her gender, it allowed Boo to be more charming, playful, and light. Just as there's something that's built to be cute, there's something that's built to be scary, and when you take the rules that apply to each one and switch them around, that's always one of the most entertaining things you can do."

Stanton also liked the idea of using a child who was still inarticulate. "Boo's age was debated for a while," recalled Stanton, "and there was a faction of us that right away saw the appeal of picking a child

that wasn't speaking words yet. That would allow an easier leap for the audience, to see that she is perceived [by Sulley] as a pet first and not as a person. Also, I think one reason people have such fondness for their pets is that they don't know the specifics of how that animal feels, so they can project how much that animal loves them, and [that's] always going to be more powerful than if everything was spelled out for them. Having a kid that can just speak goobly-gook allows the same thing for the audience and the characters in the movie. Before the power of that became obvious to some peo-

**A CHARACTER CRYSTALIZED:** Conceived as a red, armless demon, Mike Wazowski—under the inspired voice acting of Billy Crystal—became a less-threatening green creature with a startlingly expressive eye.







protect our precious natural resources. In fact, one story point was modeled on the Environmental Protection Agency. "We came up with the CDA (for Child Detection Agency)," recalled Stanton. "That was a lot of fun, because they have monsters who come in just like in SILKWOOD

arriving via the closet. "In designing the Monsters Inc. factory," said Docter, "we had to figure out the practicalities of how it would all work, just as if it were a real factory. Production designer Bob Pauley came up with the idea of a bowling alley for the scare floor, which you can see in its shape. It's a '50s type of design, and the idea is that you have all these scare doors set up in columns. After a monster goes through the door to scare a kid, it comes back, deposits the screams that have been collected, and a

new door drops into place. It's almost like bowling."

Maintaining the logic of the monsters' world was crucial. "Since we already had all these weird, fantasy creatures," noted Docter, "if we put them in a completely bizarre and alien

ple, we really had to record [two-year-old] Mary Gibbs's voice and put some of that into the movie. Nobody was saying, 'No, you can't do that.' They just wondered if it would work. But I know Pete, and that's his forte."

"When we figured out that children's screams are what would power this world," continued Stanton, "it then became fun to figure out the way it would all work and the way they would go about collecting children's screams. That all shows in the monster factory, down to the smallest details: Why everything is put there, and how their day would run. It gives them a kind of FLINTSTONES world, where part of the entertainment is seeing how this world actually works. We wouldn't take every movie to the same degree we do in MONSTERS, INC., but I think this

and clean the place up, because children are supposed to be toxic to monsters. But while we were writing it, we certainly didn't know there would be an energy crisis coming up, and most of the analogies we used



film really called for it. It's part of its appeal. We even have an energy crisis where you have to conserve screams or there'll be rolling blackouts."

While certainly not a major message in the movie, the concomitant issue of conservation, whether in the monsters' world or our own, may be a subtle reminder to both children and adults to keep fighting to pro-

at the time, were to the energy crisis in the '70s."

One of the main settings at the Monsters Inc. factory is the 'scare floor,' an assembly line where doors leading into children's rooms throughout the world drop into place one after another. Monsters are launched through the doors and into a child's room,

world with spindly towers and fantastic designs, you wouldn't have any recognizable grounding or something you could relate to. We found that the more logical and 'relatable' their world was, the more contrast there was to make the characters stand out. We also had to figure out all the practicalities of where the monsters lived and worked. They come in sizes ranging from three feet to nine feet tall, and some of them have tentacles, some have feet, some have fifty hands with lots of fingers. Everything has to be built to accommodate this wide

range of species. It's like in our world, where there's been a lot of retrofitting for handicapped people. Doors have to be accessible, and we've tried to incorporate a

lot of that in designing the settings. For instance, in their apartments they have double doors, with one smaller door fitted within a bigger door. If you're a smaller monster, you can easily adjust."

**PROGRESS IS THEIR MOST IMPORTANT PRODUCT:** An at-home moment between Sulley and Mike goes from storyboard (top), to wireframe (middle-left), to render (middle-right), and takes a detour for a test run of the fur process (left).



Complicating Sulley's position at the office is Randall Boggs (Steve Buscemi), the number two kid-scarer at the company who covets Sulley's position as the top terrorizer. His lizard-like design, with eight arms and legs, makes him a very frightening monster, one of the few that actually scares Boo. "Randall is based on a chameleon and [its] ability to blend into the background," said Docter. "I always found that frightening as a kid. It would be terrifying to wake up in your room and see a monster, but the idea that there might be a monster you can't see is even more frightening. That makes him a great scarer, because he can disappear or use little subtle tricks to scare kids—like tapping on a window or rolling a ball across the floor—and the kid doesn't know where he is. Whatever he stands in front of, he assimilates its color. If it's a brick wall, he gets a brick texture all over him, so you never know where he might be. He could be hiding and listening to you, and we have a couple of scenes where we play off of that. In one scene, Randall is fighting with Sullivan, and Sulley doesn't know where he's coming from. He's looking all over the room, but he can't see Randall, because he's invisible. Then suddenly...whack...he'll get hit from behind. Chameleons also have eyes that can move independent of each other, and we tried to endow Randall with a little bit of that. But if we went too far with that, he just looked kind of kooky, and we wanted him to be a threatening presence, so we just used it sparingly."

The idea of making the monster factory parallel a real-life corporate entity, complete with a work force of kid-scarers, dispatchers, secretaries, and receptionists, led to research in several areas of corporate structure and identity. Producer Darla Anderson said, "We looked at old corporate films and videos, and did some research into corporate designs. Paul Rand designed a lot of logos, because in the graphics world there's a lot about corporate identities and how detailed they get."

Did Pixar's own chairman, Steve Jobs—also the CEO of corporate giant Apple Computers, Inc.—serve as a model for the harried-but-benevolent Henry J. Waterhouse? "No," deadpanned Anderson. "It was all based on (Disney CEO) Michael Eisner."

"Actually, whenever we had to think of what a CEO would do," said Stanton, "we thought, *What does Steve Jobs or Michael Eisner do?* They all have their different approaches, but there are definitely common areas that you try to jump on. Like the stock price: No matter how much they're trying not to be affected by it, the stock price always seems to come up. A CEO always wants to make stockholders happy, and we wanted to make sure the audience knows that Waterhouse is driven by that."

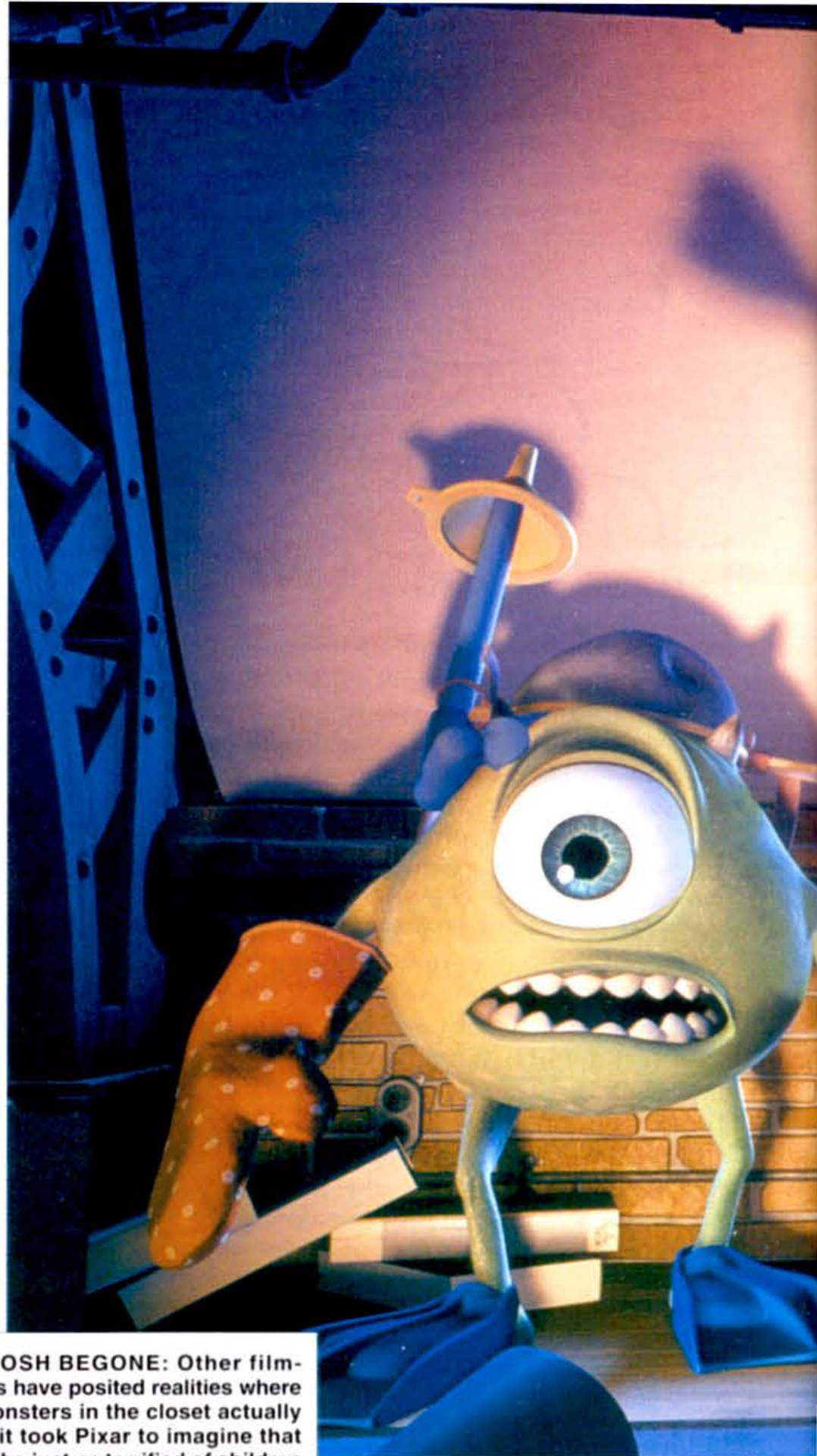
Although Monsters, Inc. is the number

one factory in the monster world, with its patent on the through-the-closet-door scare, there are several competitors in Monstropolis who are also in the business of scream collecting. The number two company is FearCo, which has the patent on the under-the-bed scare. Scaremaster rounds out the Big Three scare factories.

Once a logical corporate structure within the monster world was set, the filmmakers had to decide just how scary the monsters populating it should be. "After all," said Lasseter, "we're dealing with subject matter about monsters whose job is to come in and scare kids, so that was one of the issues we had to deal with—we thought we might scare the heck out of kids. However, I believe very strongly in G-rated movies that play just as well for adults as for children. That's what we're dedicated to at Pixar. I really think the world needs more of these."

"In the grand design of the film," explained Stanton, "we wanted to get across that monsters are not scary outside of their job. The best way it was put, was, 'It's nothing personal—it's just our job.' Once you know that, we wanted to make it so the monsters are scary while they're doing their job, but not scary when they've finished their job. That idea plays a role in the film, even in the conceit of the plot, making it much more of a challenge, rather than just trying to make the monsters either scary or friendly."

An interesting analogy can be drawn with horror stars like Boris Karloff and Christopher Lee, who played fearsome monsters in front of the camera, but once they stepped off-stage, became the nicest people you could imagine. And while children love horror-film monsters, some parents may be put off by the title MONSTERS, INC. David Silverman, the film's co-director and a veteran animation director on THE SIMPSONS, recalled some early parental reactions: "Pete Docter has kids, and when he was talking to other parents and mentioning that he was doing a film called MONSTERS, INC., they'd be a little bit startled and say, 'Oh, well, I'm not going to let my kids see that one!' We had



**OSHKOSH BEGONE:** Other filmmakers have posited realities where the monsters in the closet actually exist; it took Pixar to imagine that they'd be just as terrified of children as children are of them.

a lot of scary ideas that we had to tone down or discard.

At the same time, we had to have something to show the point of what they're doing. So a lot of it is now implied."

An additional way to soften the fear factor was to design the monsters as grotesquely as possible, and then take some of the edge off their more horrifying qualities. "We wanted the coloring of the characters to be based on how little kids might draw and color monsters," observed Lasseter. "We used bright colors with polka dots and stripes, but done in a way that's kind of natural looking. We thought that monsters have been coming into kids' rooms for a long time, so even though they're brightly colored, they still have real fur and claws. When kids see them, they'd draw them, with their limited drawing skills, as having blue fur and purple polka-dots and big horns. People would say, 'Oh, look, Johnny draws such cute little monsters,' but in reality these are the giant creatures that are coming through the





closet door every night!

"It was a real challenge, actually—the more realistic the coloring was, the more scary the monsters became, and if we made them too fanciful, you wouldn't buy it. It wasn't fitting into the world we created."

In designing the various monsters, the artists at Pixar avoided the classics, like vampires and werewolves, and generally created their own original concepts, using some of the same ideas that went into the creation of such mythological monsters as griffins, centaurs, and gorgons. "A lot of the characters are based loosely on real animals," explained Docter. "We talked to a lot of kids, and got their thoughts and drawings, and coupled that with historical monsters, where the common thread, through all sorts of cultures, was how they took real animals and shuffled the deck a little bit. You'd have the head of an elephant, the body of a horse, and the tail of a lizard. We then took the attributes of actual animals and fed them through a kid filter.

That's how we came up with Sullivan, who is basically a huge bear or a giant ground sloth with horns, but he's got blue fur with purple spots. Mike is kind of based on a frog—with those legs and skin—but he's got just one big eye in the middle of his round head. It's kind of a combination of kids' ideas versus real life animals.

After designing a plethora of different creatures for the film, the sheer volume of different monster characters created a slight problem for the animators who'd have to bring them all to life. In *A BUG'S LIFE*, the ants were all basically the same shape and size, while nearly fifty different species of monsters would be appearing in *MONSTERS, INC.* Supervising animator Glenn McQueen, who served in the same capacity on *A BUG'S LIFE* and *TOY STORY 2*, noted that, "Some characters had eight tentacles for arms, while other characters were nothing but an eye on a stalk with little crab legs. And whenever you ask an animator to do a shot with a character they haven't worked on before,

there's a small learning curve as the animator gets used to the new character. On all our main characters—Sulley, Mike, Boo, Randall, and Watnoose—just about every animator worked on them. But a lot of the background monsters were more difficult, because we had to build them in a hurry, and the animation controls were not as refined as we had on our main characters."

Eben Ostby, Pixar's resident modeling genius, supervised the creation of the computer models for the main characters. These were all sculpted in clay before being realized in the computer with their individual animation controls. The proprietary program used to create these controls was dubbed "Geppetto." Unlike the puppet master's work in *PINOCCHIO*, though, each model had more than six hundred "strings" that would allow the animators to move each character on their computer workstations. Creating each model was just as complicated as if you were to actually build a real working model in a ma-



chine shop, because of these complex controls. "That's our creative appetite," declared McQueen. "No matter how fast our machines are, we're always designing characters that are more complex than our previous film. You always want more control, and sometimes that means finer control. We might ask for a little more control over the face, another control for over the eyebrow, or a twist in the arm. With Sulley, because he's a big guy, you might want to have a little shudder run through his body fat every time he walks. So we asked for more controls in his belly."

"It may also mean that you want smarter controls, so if you have a series of animation controls in Sulley's face, you might want to gang them all together in some big macro. Of course, every time you do that, it adds tremendously to the time it takes to render one frame on film, and it slows the system down. Ultimately, it means that, even though our computers are continually getting quicker, we respond by creating characters that are more and more complex. So although it seems like we're swimming faster, we're real-

to create all the mouth shapes for the honing we do to create lip-sync. The same animator would also do run-and-walk cycles, as well as the usual exploratory character animation done in pre-production to figure out who the character is and how it moves. So for each character, we had one 'official' pre-production lead: John Kahrs for Sulley; Andrew Gordon for Mike Wazowski; and Dave DeVan for Boo. We also had the rest of the animators do pre-production animation on all of the main characters, so everyone would be familiar with them. In the end, everybody really contributed to the development of the characters, so I'm not in such a big rush to stratify the department into character leads and non-character leads. I think every shot an animator does tells us a little bit more about the character than what we've seen previously."

**ORGANIZATION MEN:** Director Pete Docter (foreground) confers with co-director David Silverman (center) and lead story artist Bob Peterson (back) on a story board. **BELOW:** Lizard-like Randall Boggs (Steve Buscemi) turns out to be more monstrous than even his co-workers can stand.

Another big technological problem for the animators was how to create fur that looked and moved realistically. "We decided we really wanted Sullivan to be a

furry character," said Lasseter. "A lot of research went into Sulley's fur program. It was absolutely critical for the animators that the fur would be sort of invisible. They could just animate the character, and then the fur would follow his movements."

To achieve that, technical lead Michael Fong led a group of computer sci-

ural and realistic overlapping action on Sulley's long fur."

At first, Glenn McQueen was worried about the ultimate effectiveness of the fur program. "I thought it wouldn't look right," admitted McQueen. "We would be initially animating Sulley in wire-frame and then in post—we would run him through a program that would simulate how his hair would move, just as if he had hair like a real bear. But we were key-framing in the animation, and sometimes simulation can look almost too real. I thought the difference between the two would be like oil and water. In the initial animation, when he's buck naked, he might move one way, and when the hair simulation program is run, there's suddenly all this overlapping hair on his arm that could change the quality of the animation. If there was a lot of long hair hanging off his elbow or forearm, it might soften the snappiness of a movement."

"Secondly, I thought we'd have to go in and change a lot of the animation afterwards, because we cheat all the time. We move a character much too fast or too slow to make a certain point, or to hit a beat. We're always stretching and pulling and taking all kinds of liberties with physics to make the scene more entertaining. To take this animation, which is not physically correct, and then put it through something that simulates the physics of real hair—I didn't quite know if it would work. In the end, it worked very well. There really were not many occasions where we had to change things—my hat's really off to all the technical people who worked on simulating Sulley's hair."

Although Sullivan has a dynamic fur coat, none of the other monsters in the film do, "and there's a reason for that!" declared Docter. "Early on, we tried not to be restricted too much by technical things like the fur, because if we know too much about what's hard to accomplish, we're likely to compromise some aspects of the design or story. So we try to ignore all that, to the great dismay of a lot of people. Later on, when the brutal reality hits us, that's when we realize we may have to compromise somewhat. So the Yeti has hair too, but we made it like a sheep, where it's all tightly curled, and it doesn't need to be dynamic. We reserved all the fancy dynamic hair movement for Sulley. It's expensive enough just having the non-dynamic fur, because it takes a long time to render those frames."

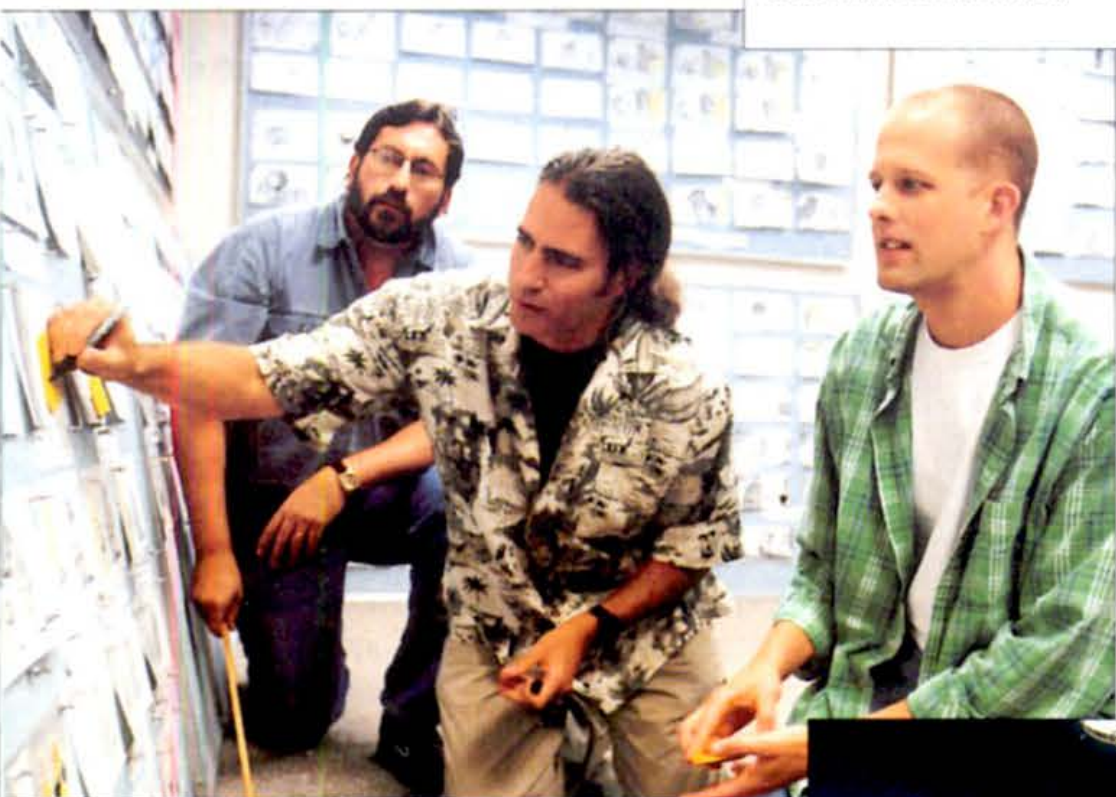
Having dynamic fur mixed with animation recalled the "Dynamation" process of Ray Harryhausen, who will be given an appropriate homage in *MONSTERS, INC.* When Mike takes his girlfriend, Celia Mae, out to eat, it is at a sushi restaurant named "Harry Hausen's." "We thought that was especially fitting, since it's a monster film," said Docter. "There's a lot of little

continued on page 53

ly just treading water."

Just as the number of animation controls on each model increased, so did the number of animators who were needed to manipulate them. On *MONSTERS, INC.*, that number has nearly doubled from the twenty-seven animators who toiled on the original *TOY STORY*. That, in turn, necessitated the use of lead character animators for the first time at Pixar. "Actually, leading animator is a kind of a misleading title," noted McQueen. "What we did on *MONSTERS, INC.* was really to have character buddies, so as the character models were being built, we had animators who were working with the different technical directors who were creating the models to help on the design and articulation of each character. Then they'd follow through

entists who developed a dynamic fur program that allowed Sullivan to be animated independently of his fur coat. "We would run the fur simulation program after the main animation was done," explained Lasseter, "and then tweak it. If it was a really fast movement, they could turn things down, so it wouldn't be too wild. If it was a real subtle movement, they could turn it up, so you'd get some nice overlapping action. What we were looking for was to have nat-





# MONSTERS, INC.

## Andrew Stanton

### Creating Films for the Whole Family is What This Writer/Exec Producer Lives For

**M**ONSTERS, INC. is Pixar's fourth film to feature a script co-written by Andrew Stanton, who also was an executive producer. Stanton received an Oscar nomination for his contribution to the screenplay of TOY STORY, and has subsequently become Pixar's top screenwriter. "They keep giving me the job," he joked, "so I can't be screwing up that badly. Actually, I was more involved on MONSTERS, INC. as an executive producer during the early stages, because Pete Docter and Jeff Pidgeon came up with the initial idea.... I came in to help Pete on his first movie and sort of played an objective party. It wasn't until about a year and a half into it, when they were having a frustrating time trying to get the story into shape, that I came on as a writer.

"At that point, there were a lot of strong opinions about where the story should go, and who should do it, and they finally asked me if I would give it a shot. By then, A BUG'S LIFE was coming to an end, and as busy I was in post-production, oftentimes you spend a lot of time in post sitting around, waiting for things to get done, like the color timing or the sound design. When the offer came up, I think they expected my answer to be 'No,' but I thought about it and said, 'Within this time frame, I can give it a try.'

"I actually enjoyed it, because I find the back-end of a movie really only needs your physical presence and the part of you that's always thinking up

ideas is kind of shut off, so I was raring to go. I was actually up at Skywalker Ranch working on the sound mix for A BUG'S LIFE, and they found this little room for me to work in, right upstairs next to the projector. There was this big, loud projection noise, and I was in the room next door typing away, coming up with different



ideas for MONSTERS, INC. It was kind of nice, because I don't usually get a concentrated three or four weeks like that, where I'm able to just focus on one thing. I'm sure most writers get that, but it was a real luxury for me—it allowed me to give most of the foundation to what MONSTERS, INC. would become. I named the little girl Boo; developed Sulley and Mike's relationship further; came up with the idea of children's screams powering the Monster world; and brought the whole caper aspect to it. Those were all fundamental ideas that weren't there before. Then, once I had that, I knew it would evolve even further, because everything we do at Pixar evolves, and Dan Gerson came in after I left, and kept running with it. I spent the rest of my time playing executive producer on it, because we had TOY STORY 2 going and I was de-



**ACCESSIBLE AND PROFITABLE:** MONSTER INC. writer and executive producer Andrew Stanton wishes to make films that appeal to all members of an audience.

veloping my own next picture, FINDING NEMO."

Besides the possibility of receiving a second screenwriting Oscar nomination, MONSTERS, INC. will be eligible to be nominated in the new category of Best Animated Feature Film. It seems likely that, besides MONSTERS, INC., the other leading contenders will be SHREK, ATLANTIS, and FINAL FANTASY. However, Stanton is not entirely pleased by the Academy's new honor. "By giving animated films their own slot," he said, "my feeling is [that] now we're forever resigned to the kids' table. No matter how good we make an animated movie, nobody's going to say, 'This holds up against any movie.' I don't want to look a gift horse in the mouth; it's still great to have the acknowledgment, but at Pixar we don't think of animation as a separate medium as strongly as other people do. When we're in the thick of things, we're trying to make the best damn movie we can. We're not thinking, *Oh,*

*it's only animated, so we have to do it like this.* We're thinking, *I want the movie to be as good as this,* just like THE GODFATHER, CITIZEN KANE, STAR WARS, or whatever other great movie you'd care to name. For us, it's kind of frustrating, knowing that no matter how hard we work, the film's going to come out, and 'Boom,' you're still going to be sitting at the kids' table.

"I think there's plenty of room for good movies," observed Stanton, "especially good family movies. To me, the hardest movie to make is one that an eight-year-old, an eighteen-year-old, and an eighty-year-old can all go to see and enjoy. It's not that I'm a purist, but why exclude people if you don't have to? Animation will always draw young audiences, so you don't have to work too hard in that area. You just want to make sure you don't exclude children, then you just have to work harder trying to get everybody who's still a kid inside to see the movie."

—Lawrence French



# MONSTERS, INC.

## John Lasseter

### He's Relinquishing the Director's Chair, But Not Pixar's Mission

**A**fter directing three immensely successful computer-animated films, John Lasseter has become something hitherto unheard of in the animation field: a superstar director. However, on *MONSTERS, INC.*, and several of Pixar's upcoming films, Lasseter will step back to take on the role of executive producer, a nebulous title which is probably somewhat misleading.

Creative consultant might be

casting, being in story sessions, and bouncing ideas around. I've been there from the very beginning. But at Pixar, we work as a collective group. Pete Docter is the director, and I'm the executive vice-president of creative, so as with all the creative things being done at Pixar, I oversee and help on them. But it's not a place where one person makes a movie, but where a group of people make a movie."

To that end, Lasseter notes

group input. I tend to get an awful lot of credit for the things that go on here, because I'm the creative guy in charge, but I don't do everything. During the production process, everyone gets to put their own creative ability into the task at hand, and there's virtually no politics going on. In the end, what's nice about it is we all have ownership in the movie. I've always believed that the feeling and atmosphere at a studio come from the top, so I

try to be honest, funny, crazy, and just have fun with what we do. I realize I'm an example for everybody here, and it kind of permeates the place."

With regards to the recent computer-animation movies being made at other studios, Lasseter was most impressed with Dreamworks' *SHREK*. "I saw it with my family and we all liked it," he admitted. "It had some really fun things in it, like the world where all the fairy tale characters were alive."

Although Lasseter had yet to see *FINAL FANTASY*, he had

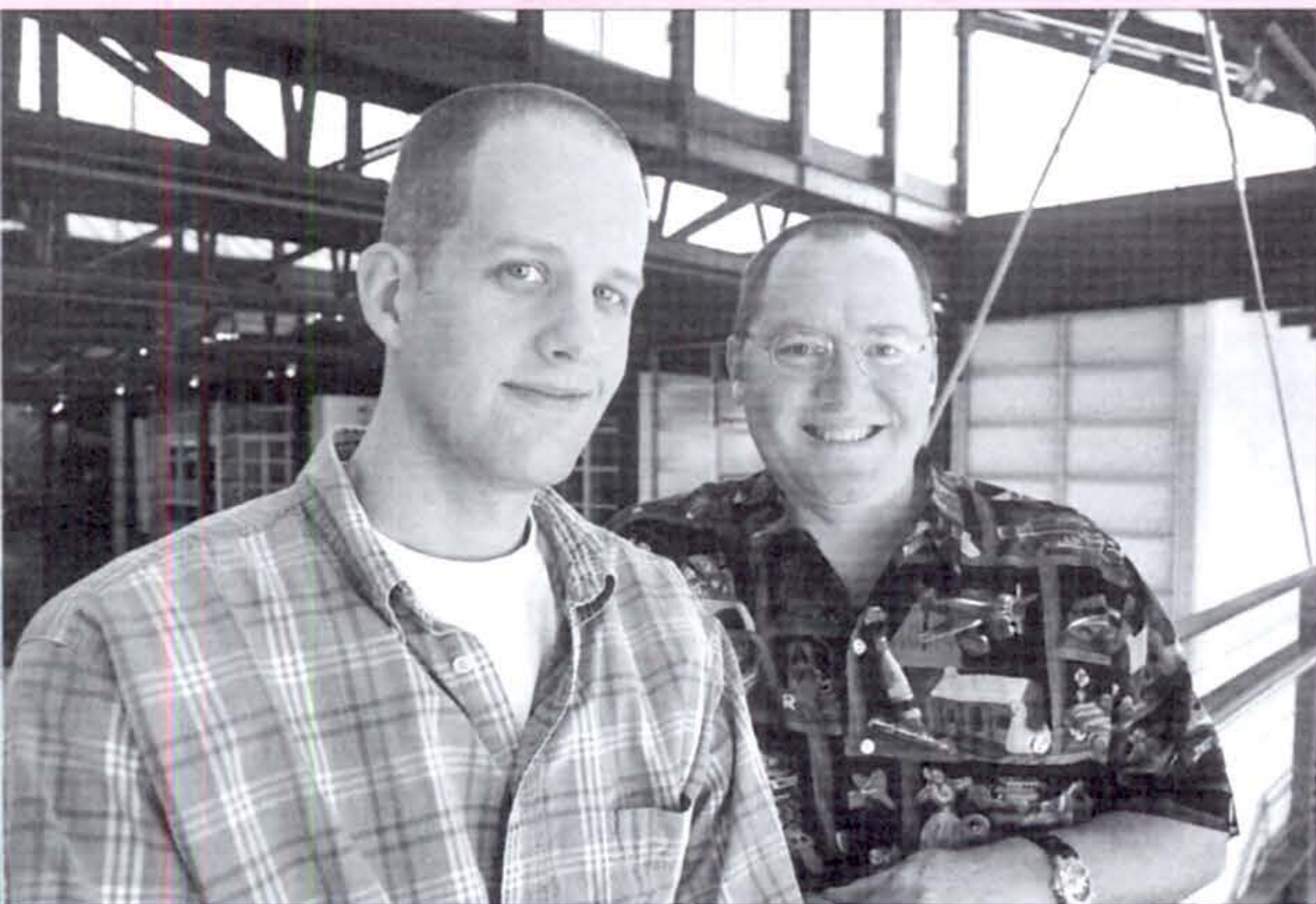
grave doubts about the need to create realistic humans in a computer-animated film. "I don't understand why it's been the Holy Grail of computer animation to make realistic humans," he said. "I always ask, 'Why?' I ask my staff that in everything we do, from choosing the subject matter to the story to the main characters in the film: Why do it with computer

animation? What can our medium do to it that can make the movie that much better? Why not just take a camera and film real actors? It's easier, and a heck of a lot cheaper. In the end, people just don't get it. It takes really talented animators to make the characters come to life, not the computers. So even if you can get a computer-generated image of a human being to look absolutely real, who's going to make it act? You can move it from one place to another, but to make it come alive, so every single movement looks like it's driven by the character's own thought process, takes a very talented animator. No program or motion-capture system is going to be able to do that.

"In the end, you want the audience to enjoy the movie as a great story, and then say, 'It wouldn't be nearly as good in any other medium.' So I've always questioned this idea of creating realistic human beings in computer animation."

In recent 2-D animation, Lasseter's favorite director is Hayao Miyazaki, whose best-known film in America is *MY NEIGHBOR TOTORO*. "I think Miyazaki's greatest film is probably *LAPUTA, CASTLE IN THE SKY*," said Lasseter. "It's a remarkable work. He's been a huge influence in my later years, and he's actually become a friend of mine. I met him when I was in Japan to promote *TOY STORY*, and later I had dinner with him in Los Angeles when Disney and Miramax picked up a lot of his films for release in America. I didn't have anything to do with the deal, but naturally, put in a good word about him."

—Lawrence French



**TURNING OVER THE REIGNS:** *MONSTER'S INC.* director Pete Docter (left) picks up the Pixar banner from groundbreaking founder John Lasseter (right).

a more appropriate designation. "Executive producer is really a catch-all title," admitted Lasseter. "It can have a number of different meanings in Hollywood, and in my case, I really don't know. From a corporate standpoint, I oversee absolutely everything creative that goes on at Pixar, and on *MONSTERS, INC.*, I was involved in all aspects of the film, including the

that the typical 'a film by' opening credit would be an absurdity for an animated film. "That's why you won't see it at Pixar. It's a 'Pixar Animation Studios Film,' and that's right up there in front. Generally, we all build on each other's ideas, so in the end it's something no single person could have thought of, and we wouldn't have gotten the same results without there being that



in-jokes like that in the movie."

In casting the voice actors for the film, Docter and his co-directors steered strongly towards independent film actors, rather than the big star names who have begun to dominate the vocals of many other animated films. "I don't like the idea that you just take out a golden Rolodex and get all these big names, and suddenly find you're going to have a great character," said Stanton. "Sure, it can be an asset and it helps your marquee value, but it's not the thing that makes or breaks the character."

For Sulley, John Goodman seemed a fitting choice, particularly since he played a Cyclops in Joel Cohen's *O BROTHER WHERE ART THOU?*, a tribute to Preston Sturges's comedy classic *SULLIVAN'S TRAVELS*. Like *SULLIVAN'S* fictitious film director (played by Joel McCrea), Sulley goes through a journey of discovery that ends with the realization that the power of laughter is far stronger than the power of screams. "The first time we recorded John Goodman, we realized our take on the character was slightly flawed," observed Docter. "With John, we got a sense of this really strong, football-player-type of guy, but with a kind and tender inner heart. So we went more in that direction with his character. It's a real process of discovery, because as soon as you sign someone to a part, they end up changing it, just by the nature of who they are. And we really try to use what the actor brings to the role, and what their personality is."

That certainly applied when Billy Crystal signed for the role of Mike Wazowski. "With Billy, it was like having a staff of writers right there in the room," explained Docter. "We'd give him the lines we'd come up with, and then he'd start ad-libbing different ideas. Although he usually stayed centered on the basic idea, he occasionally went off on a different tangent. Even then, we'd sometimes end up using what he did. Ultimately, if it was entertaining and it served the story, we'd use it. If it just stopped the film and went into some kind of weird zone, we'd throw it out."

Strangely enough, Billy Crystal's personality seemed to fit like a glove for Mike, even though his character was basically one huge eyeball dominating a rotund green face and body. Co-director David Silverman said, "There was just something about Mike's smile that caught Billy's energy of exuberance. Mike's design came out really fast. It was a real brain-pop of Ricky Nierva. At first he was going to be this two-legged guy with no arms, with a sort-of smirk on his face and a red-devilish color. Then we thought we had to give him arms—he's a main character, and it's pretty hard to play a main character without arms—and his color evolved into a cooler shade of green. Also, since Mike has just one big eye, it had to be

very expressive. He didn't have an eyebrow, so we just gave him a fold of skin that works like an eyebrow. Andrew Gordon, the lead animator on Mike, trained a camera on his

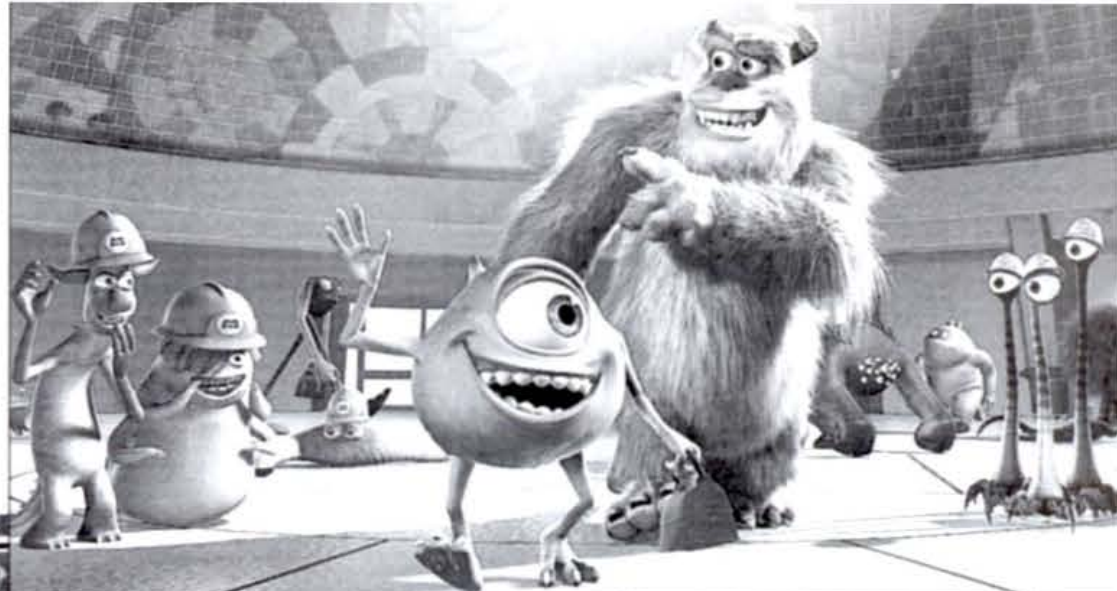


**TOP:** Major task for the Pixar artists was to create a society of monsters that wouldn't traumatize viewers at first sight. **LEFT:** Co-director Lee Unkrich (seated) at work with supervising technical director Tom Porter.

own eyes to study the little adjustments they would make—seeing what the pupil and cornea would do, how they float around, and what the folds of flesh around the eye do to adjust for that. Then when the animators moved the eye around on Mike, it gave you another dimension of expression."

James Coburn was selected for Henry J. Waternoose due to his dignified and gravelly voice. "The thing we got from Coburn," said Docter, "which we really didn't anticipate, was a real warmth and a kind of vulnerability. I always imagined Waternoose as more of cold, ruthless businessman, who could be happy and charming, but a little off-putting, because he comes on so strong. That was more of the character I was thinking about. Then, when we recorded James Coburn, we found he imbued the character with a real warmth and sincerity."

For the vocal performance of Boo, Mary Gibbs, the two-year-old daughter of Pixar story artist Rob Gibbs, was recruited, and proved somewhat of a challenge to direct. "We gave her a lot of sugar items," explained Docter, "and then followed her around with a microphone. I tried to direct her, but she was quite young. I'd say, 'Can you pretend that you're really scared?' and she'd simply say, 'No.' So I brought in a puppet that she would talk to, and she'd play with some other quiet toys. That way we got the natural sounding kid talk she did, as well as a couple of fits, which we used. The sound editors took it all and used little snippets and pieces of the recording to



make it sound as if it was appropriate to the scenes. It worked out really well, actually, because it sounds so genuine and appealing, as opposed to using a child actor or even an adult actor, which they often do in animated films."

Other Pixar employees were also used for voice tracks, usually after first having provided compelling temp tracks. Lead story artist Bob Peterson switched genders for the voice of the slug-like dispatcher, Roz, who hands out all the scare assignments.

"Bob was so funny as the voice of Roz," said Silverman, "that we couldn't find anybody better. We tried a few other people, but nobody was quite as funny as Bob. A lot of Roz was designed by Bob, who did the storyboards for her, so Bob

was playing to type. When he pitched the boards, he used Roz's voice, and we used it for the scratch track. The same thing happened for Needleman and Smitty, two of the assistants at the factory. Dan Gerson was a writer we hired who came in after Andrew Stanton did his draft. He did scratch tracks for a number of voices. We really liked his voices for Needleman and Smitty, and he was basing a lot of the voice on what the characters looked like, so they talked in this kind of cracking teenage voice."

Co-director David Silverman explained that, in the end, the actual story of *MONSTERS, INC.* is one of friendship, loyalty, and the ability to be true to oneself and do what is right. "I think when you do any type of film," said Silverman, "even if it's a very satirical comedy, if you have heart in it, people can laugh and really care about the characters, and it means so much more. The laughs becomes a release from feeling sad, or feeling warm, and you enjoy laughing that much more."

For Pete Docter, looking back on the five long years of work it has taken to bring *MONSTERS, INC.* to the screen, he is most gratified by the emotional impact he hopes audiences will derive from the picture. "The movie really hangs together on the relationship between this big hairy beast of a monster and an innocent little girl," he said. "That relationship is what brings you through the film, and it's what I think you'll leave with."

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## Art Direction

By Lawrence French

Creating a world where monsters live and work might seem like a fanciful assignment, but for production designers Harley Jessup and Bob Pauley, it had more to do with research and reality than in using their unbridled imaginations. Harley Jessup, who, early in his career, worked on designs for *SESAME STREET*, was a visual effects art director at ILM for many years, until he departed to work on Henry Selick's stop-motion extravaganza, *JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH*. For the last five years, Jessup toiled on various concepts and set designs for *MONSTERS, INC.* He started on the project when Pete Docter and Jeff Pidgeon were first conceiving the story. "I had a lot to learn about CGI," said Jessup, "but it was really fun, and there were a lot of similarities with stop-motion animation. Like we did on *JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH*, we drew up plans for every single prop in the movie, and I had to

learn about the CGI process, and how all the different departments needed to be served."

For his first effort in CGI, Jessup was pleased that he and Bob Pauley proved to be such a good match. "Bob had worked on *TOY STORY* and *A BUG'S LIFE* before," explained Jessup, "so he had great insight about the CGI world. There's a whole believability factor about CGI that he was really good at. Bob worked on the character designs and the environments that had mechanical parts to them, while I was doing environment designs and the look of each set."

In *MONSTERS, INC.*, because the situations and monsters themselves were already so fanciful, the idea took hold to root the world they lived in on reality. To that end, Harley Jessup and Bob Pauley did research in northeastern factory towns, the details of which would become the model for "Monstropolis," the city where all the monsters dwelled. "There's this rich sense of history in all those kinds of industry towns," noted executive pro-

ducer John Lasseter. "The design guys all went back to Pittsburgh to do research. They visited the steel mills and the surrounding towns in that area to get the feel of what an eastern industrial city is like."

"Early on, nobody knew exactly what this monster world was going to look like," continued Jessup. "We came up with all sorts of different ideas. One of them was to make it seem really ancient, because the monsters have been scaring kids since the dawn of man. Finally, we decided to make the monster city seem as if it had been built around the turn of the century and make it into a company town, like Pittsburgh is a steel town. We visited Pittsburgh and took a lot of pictures for reference; we did a map to figure out the geography of the city; and we made it so the factories were across the river. There's a main downtown area, along with a section of residential apartment buildings. And since the

monsters live in this parallel world, we didn't want it to seem like it went on forever—as if they had their own planet—so we came up with a city limit we called 'the edge of the world.'"

The main setting in Monstropolis was to be the monsters' workplace, a factory where they do various jobs related to the collecting of children's screams. "The idea for the factory," explained Jessup, "was that it was built in the '50s, when they tore down an older Victorian factory and rebuilt it to keep up with the growing demand caused by the baby boom. But now, in 2001, this factory is showing signs of age, as the monsters try to keep their struggling scream production up."

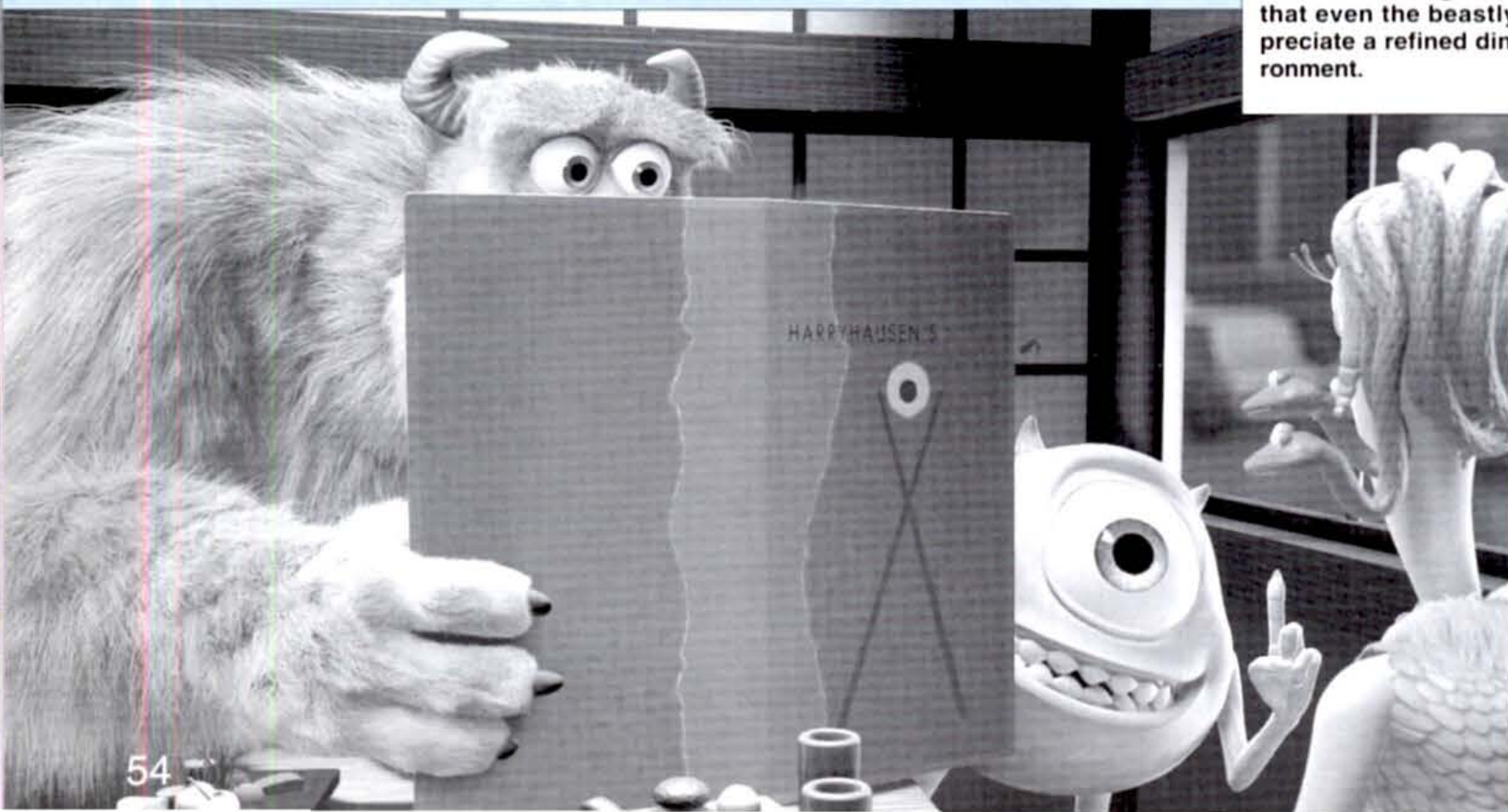
Bob Pauley designed many of the realistic working mechanisms for the factory, including a large, open "scare floor," where the monsters do their main work. "We started with

this nutty idea of the scare doors," said Jessup, "where the monsters have a door that leads to an equivalent closet door in a child's bedroom. The scare doors are pulled out of a vast door 'filing

vault; they come into the scare floor on these elaborate overhead tracks and then get pulled down into a door station."

To get all the details of the factory as realistic as possible, the design team visited several assembly plants to observe their interiors and see how the machinery actually worked. "You clearly see cubicles with rows of assembly binders," said Pauley, "and there's a lot of computers and paperwork. Since it takes a big leap of faith to believe that you can walk

**MONSTROUS, BUT TASTEFUL:** *MONSTERS, INC.*'s in-joke Harry Hausen's restaurant was designed to show that even the beastly can appreciate a refined dining environment.





through these scare doors and suddenly be inside a kid's room, we built the door stations with lots of detail, so you'll accept it more readily. They have all the stylistic elements you've seen before in other industries, like hydraulic rams, swipe cards, and different switches. It all looks like they could actually work."

Influencing the design of the factory were the futuristic sets created by the produc-



**FANTASTIC WORKPLACE: MONSTERS, INC.'s** designers endeavored to capture the contrast between fantastic creatures and functional settings (top). **LEFT:** Animator John Kahrns at work.

tion designer Ken Adam, such as Auric Goldfinger's laser-equipped lair from the James Bond thriller *GOLDFINGER*, and the war room in Stanley Kubrick's *DR. STRANGELOVE*. "We also looked at a lot of World's Fair and modernistic architecture," stated Jessup. "Then, for the city itself, we looked at older industrial revolution sources, and pictures of Paris by the French photographer Eugene Atget—his pictures show a nice combination of the old and the new. We also looked at the Jacques Tati film, *MON ONCLE*, for the kind of crazy bureaucracy it showed, as well as the way Paris looked in it."

Design influences also came from several classic Disney films, including Eyvind Earle's stylized background paintings from *SLEEPING BEAUTY*, and Mary Blair's paintings for *CINDERELLA*. "They were all very graphic and 2-D looking," said Jessup, "and we evolved that into a 3-D look that was more suited to CGI. Early on, we were trying to see how far we could push these 2-D forms

and still have them exist in a 3-D world. In the final movie, we went very 3-D, but that early influence still carries through in everything from patterns of wallpaper to different graphics. Whenever we could stylize a form and make it fit, we would. We also used the fauve painter Raoul Dufy's work for a reference at the end of the movie, which was for another stylized backdrop."

Although the majority of the picture is set in the monster world, Jessup and Pauley wanted to create a design unity by stressing its parallel nature with the human world. "That's where some of the stylization came in," said Jessup. "We ended up accenting the similarities between the two worlds. I think that gives you a better parody of the monster situation, by using as many parallels as possible between the two. The monsters just have a job to do, and since they're not trying to scare each other, it's just an everyday kind of place where everything is recognizable. But it's like they're stuck in the '70s—their technology isn't quite as good as in the human world, and we had fun playing with that idea. We also worked in some motifs

that monsters would like. There's an eyeball motif and a tooth motif that both get repeated in many places. It's almost like a flower motif that you see constantly repeated in the human world."

One interesting setting was a sushi restaurant named Harry Hausen's, in homage to the famed stop-motion animator. "Originally, we had more of a tourist concept for it," revealed Jessup, "so it was more like a Benihana restaurant. But Pete and John wanted to have a fancier place, so when Mike takes his girlfriend, Celia, to dinner there, she would really be looking forward to it. We did this stark concrete building, and inside it's very spare, but elegant: There's a fish pond that casts water reflections all over the walls and ceiling, and we borrowed some of the water effects from *FINDING NEMO* (Pixar's next film), which had already been worked out to a great extent. We tried to make it very refined—there are plush booths where Mike and Celia are seated, but Boo ends up getting loose and the monsters are all afraid of her, so it's a total disaster and the whole place winds up being demolished."

The finale of the film takes place in the door vault, which was modeled after NASA's blimp hanger outside of San Jose. "We wanted to look at the biggest building we could find," said Jessup, "to get a sense of

materials and scale. We made our door vault about five times bigger, because it had to hold millions of doors. It's about fifteen-hundred feet high by a mile long, and the climax takes place inside it. There's an international door chase, with monsters going in and out of rooms all over the world. They go to Hawaii, and France, then to Japan, so they're all over the world in the space of a few minutes. It's like a wild roller coaster ride, where on either side of this huge concrete structure there are banks of thousands of pastel-colored doors riding on tracks that are going in opposite directions. It was perfect for computer animation, although it really maxed-out our rendering capacity."

Although Pixar now has three movies'-worth of sets that have already been built in their computers, none of these digital sets was raided for re-use in *MONSTERS, INC.* "We considered re-dressing Andy's room from *TOY STORY* for Boo's room," said Jessup, "but there was always a technical reason why it was easier to start from scratch. We did re-use some props, though. We took toys that had already been made for *TOY STORY* and put them in the various kids' rooms. And at the very end, when Sulley is saying goodbye to Boo, she hands him a Jesse doll [from *TOY STORY 2*]. For me, working in this new medium has been a lot of fun."

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Sebastian Spence on...

# FIRST WAVE

*The Actor Reflects on Three Years in the Combat Boots of the "Twice-Bless'd Man"*

By Miwa Hirai

Cade Foster is an ex-thief. Burdened with the memory of his childhood and the gruesome death of his beloved wife Hannah, for which he was framed, Cade begins having bizarre hallucinations centered around an alien takeover of the human race. His ultimate trial, though, comes when he discovers that he is the focus of an ancient prophecy that tells of a "twice-bless'd man," a man who will save Earth from the Third Wave—a type of Armageddon engineered by the alien Gua.

The Gua call Cade "Subject 117," the only human being to survive, and ultimately escape, from their terrible tests. Hiding from the police—who still believe he murdered Hannah—Cade travels from town to town, aided by his best friend/believer, Crazy Eddie (Rob LaBelle), and guided by the book of the lost prophecies of Nostradamus, in which Cade himself figures prominently. Now he has another believer, Jordan Radcliff (Traci Lords), a beautiful freedom fighter with the anti-Gua militia group, the Raven Nation. Jordan believes that Cade is the key to humanity's salvation, but she considers his methods—which basically amount to attempts to expose the Gua—weak and ineffective. Her answer to the Gua equation is much more direct: kill them all.

"In the middle of Season Three, Cade was beginning to win some victories against the Gua," said Sebastian Spence, who has portrayed Cade Foster for three years on the Sci Fi

Channel hit series FIRST WAVE. "But the show's creator, Chris Brancato, wanted to have Cade experience some failures. In the beginning, there was a lot of that. When Cade started winning battles, he began to lose some of his earlier doubt and was beginning to feel more confident and triumphant. All of a sudden he starts losing. He loses the Raven Nation, and then Jordan gets taken over by Mabus; all these different things. Slowly but surely, the character starts to get beaten down."

"FIRST WAVE was almost serialized from episode fifteen ['The Edge']. It was very difficult to get everything fresh and new. The storyline seemed to be on cruise control. I think I went on cruise control a bit myself. But the last two episodes are interesting to me personally, so I just went on emotion. I especially loved 'Terminal City,' although that was really tough to shoot because you see two Cades in the same frame. When we shot it, one side [was] the present and the other side represents Cade in another time, so no time is free for me since I'm acting against myself." Spence grinned. "I just visualized what Cade would do in the other side. I get to play 'an older, more annoyed' Cade Foster. That was a lot of fun. I like it whenever I get to do something different."

"Although I like Cade in the future very much, to me he is much more human than that. Cade in the present is less effective in a lot of ways. I think that happens to people in life, too. The more bad stuff happens in your life, the more you kind of

go, 'Okay, just another bad thing. I'll get over it.' I think that his character has done that, too. He gets quiet and somber. It's interesting because I think that's where Cade Foster is in the future.... That's how he ends up being so bitter. He's just gotten so used to it. He has no problem killing aliens anymore; no problems punching his own soldiers. He's just become very focused on one thing.

"I sense that's how Cade is going. He's transformed into being wiser and harder. He's not easily fooled by the aliens anymore."

After a long wait to hear of FIRST WAVE's fate, Spence finally got the word that the series would not be renewed. "It was a long time just to find out the show was ending, although by then I was just happy to be away after the long shoot. It was very hard work; I needed a break for awhile. Besides, I wanted to do something else, other stuff as an actor. So, I wasn't just waiting around for their decision."

"I feel Cade has trapped me in a lot of ways. I've talked about it with Chris several times. We discussed where the character had gone, his transformations. He's already gotten revenge for his wife's death. He's done this and that, yet at the end of it all, he still has this rage against the aliens. It's a constant thing. Also I think that by the last episode, the story tied up all the loose ends. They wanted to know about Cade's leg? We did that. We did Cade's childhood. We tried to flesh out as many stories about this guy as we could. There was nowhere else

to go. I think it went stale. In a way I feel as if we did sixty-six mini-films about Cade Foster. I think we told the story as best as we could."

After Spence finished shooting, he spent some time in his hometown in Newfoundland to rest and recharge, then went immediately into a guest appearance as a widowed father looking for his missing wife in James Cameron's DARK ANGEL ("Hit A Sista Back"). Spence also played an FBI agent with Mariel Hemingway in USA Network's HIDDEN TARGET (a.k.a. FIRST SHOT: THE PRESIDENT IS DOWN), and guested with Skid Row's Sebastian Bach on VH1's STRANGE FREQUENCY.

Spence claimed not to draw from his own life in order to create his roles. "I've tried to shy away from my own experiences. It just gets too personal and too close to home." He grinned. "There are no real criteria, although I've got many weird, crazy friends on the East Coast. When I read a new character, sometimes I try to think of a person who is similar to the one I'm going to portray. Then I'll take some of their attributes to give him some life."

Has Spence taken on some of Cade Foster's attributes? The actor paused. "I think I'm a little similar to Cade: my view of the world, my compassion for people. In many ways he is a mirror of Sebastian Spence. FIRST WAVE is definitely my biggest body of work to date. I've learned a lot of things from playing Cade Foster: pacing, control, many lessons. It's funny because Cade is such a good




guy. He's so strong-willed, pure in his nature—he's able to be angry with purity. Some people get angry and put their foot in their mouth. They say something mean, but Cade doesn't get angry like that. All the different character traits that Cade possesses are very strong. I think I like Cade a lot, even though initially, when I started the series, I didn't think I was going to. Cade is too good, too pure, but he's always so tense as well. I think I made that choice long ago, to like whom I'm given to play. Sometimes it's hard to take, because the writers don't really give me an opportunity to be happy and funny."

So, if Cade lived in the real world, would Spence hang out with him? "Oh, I'd keep my distance! He freaks me out!" He laughed. "Well, maybe it wouldn't be so bad. I probably would hang out with him. I would be much more laid back, though. I would just say, 'Calm down. Stop looking around, man!' But the character is developed that way, because every day on the set they urge him to it. He's created to be tense."

Spence's approach to acting has a specific vision. "FIRST WAVE gave me confidence as an actor. I used to get very nervous when I first went on the set. It took me a couple of days to get settled down; I wasn't able to concentrate or focus. These days, I just go in with my game plan. Now I have much more control. Sometimes you get into situations where actors want to compete with you. It's not a competition. We're supposed to work together, to complement each other. I take acting very seriously. Every time the camera rolls, my pride and honor are at stake, to a certain degree. I definitely take a lot of pride in my performances."

Spence's insight on acting and human nature helped establish an artistic and credible career. "I'm proud of being in FIRST WAVE. All the cast and crew were just so great. I'm going to miss them, although I don't feel that the show is really over. There are FIRST WAVE conventions, and fans keep showing up. I'm very proud to have shared in that, to have played Cade Foster for three years. I always will be." **CFQ**



**BLESSED COMBATANT:** Over three seasons, Sebastian Spence's Cade Foster has gone from a clueless thief to a crusader tempered in the war against the alien Gua.



# SET STORIES

## Across the Universe, on a Budget

The Crew of A WRINKLE IN TIME Builds Its Cosmos In-Camera

By Frank Garcia

Director John Kent Harrison was the beneficiary of Miramax's decision to adapt Madeline L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time* as a television mini-series. If the book had been given a feature treatment, he never would have gotten the job. "I had to work very hard to persuade the boss that I was the right choice for the movie and the particular take I have on the movie [was right]," said Harrison, on the WRINKLE set in Vancouver, Canada. "I had a fascination with science fiction/fantasy as a kid, but I like drama, human stories. I do high-budget, character-based dramas. What I could bring to this was that I could create the emotional aspects of the characters. I treat the effects as subordinate to the emotions, and not let the effects dominate the story. You have a human thread through the whole thing."

Fundamentally, WRINKLE—in telling the tale of a girl who sets off across the universe to rescue her imprisoned father—offers great challenges in practically all filmmaking disciplines. With three alien plan-

ets featured, everyone had their work cut out for them. "The conceptual part of this movie is as much fun as shooting it," said Harrison. "I really do enjoy that. I was telling the producers, when I was trying to get this job, that although I'd never had experience as a director with visual effects, I have experience as a writer. A writer's job is conceptual—to make things up—and a director's job is to interpret. As an interpreter, I haven't worked with special effects, but as a creative person, I work with special effects all the time. My theory was that I could raise my hand and say, 'The turtle man looks like this, because...' I could see it in my mind, and as the director, communicate it to the crew."

Harrison said that the reason for the book's longevity was

very simple: "It's fundamentally the story of a young girl without a father thinking that her father can solve all the problems in the universe, and she discovers that fathers can't do that. She has to attack life by herself."

Having his own children actually helped Harrison understand and communicate with lead actress Katie Stuart about her character, Meg. "I have daughters. I don't



GET DENNIS MUREN ON THE PHONE, STAT! Director John Kent Harrison decided to rely on in-camera effects to fly witches Alison Elliot and Alfre Woodard into a scene (left) and to turn Woodard into a centaur (above).

have first-hand experience of what it's like to be a twelve-year-old daughter, but I

have second-hand experience, and I know it's pretty traumatic. I knew the [visual] effects couldn't dominate her emotional journey. That was my focus.

In spite of his lack of experience in the visual effects department, Harrison happily accepted the job because Gary Hutzel—veteran of the *STAR TREK: NEXT GENERATION* and *DEEP SPACE NINE* effects departments and visual special effects d.p. on *RED PLANET* and *SPY KIDS*—was hired as WRINKLE's visual effects supervisor. "If you've read the book, it's jam-packed with special effects," said Hutzel. "Our show is a little different. Our director is inter-





ested in doing this as a motion picture, in-camera. He's taking a lot of the ideas that would normally have been done as visual effects, and integrating them with the live-action scenes."

Said Harrison, "I want to try and make all of the special effects as realistic as possible. I want to stay in the real world as much as possible and, on the visual effects, just take it to the next step, rather than jump right away to the fantasy elements."

Added Hutzel, "The easy way out for a director would be to say 'It's a special-effects picture! We'll use the special effects to tell

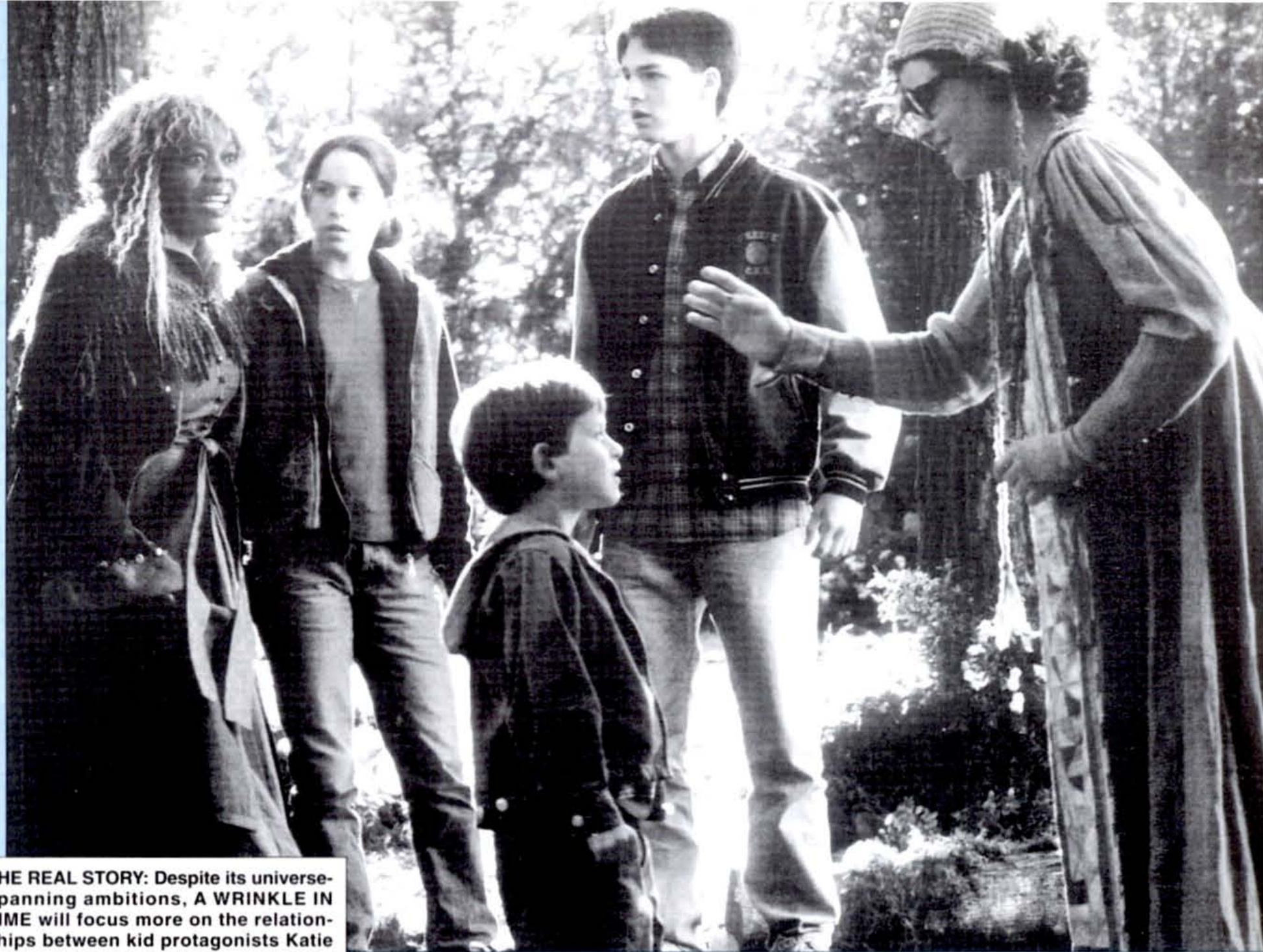
the story.' The visual effects would become an overriding character in the picture; certainly I've worked on a lot of pictures like that—without the visual effects, you have no story. That's not how John wanted to do this picture. John wanted this picture to be based on characters. The writers were very much behind this treatment, that it's really a story about people and that it happens to take place in extraordinary places."

A *WRINKLE IN TIME* presented tremendous challenges for both Hutzel and Harrison. They needed to transport three children and three "witches" to fantastic planets, where they would encounter strange beings and face a formidable enemy. "My greatest challenge is to create alien environments," said Hutzel. "What's extremely important to our director is to create a backdrop for his movie that tells the audience right away that they're in an alien environment, yet not use any of the usual props. There are no buildings or structures of any kind. They're all completely natural environments."

"The executive producer, Jordan Kerner, when he first brought me on, pulled me aside and said, 'I would like to avoid hand-painted matte paintings.' He wanted natural backdrops combined with photographs to create our alien environments—a little more demanding than what's normally done."

"When the film is actually done, we'll

**THE REAL STORY:** Despite its universe-spanning ambitions, *A WRINKLE IN TIME* will focus more on the relationships between kid protagonists Katie Stewart, David Dorfman, and Greg Smith, above.



see parks and standard locations. The trick for me is to then go and gather additional, natural images to combine with the set or location images to create the alien world.

"Normally, alien environments are easy. You just say, 'Okay, let's design some weird buildings! Let's get odd characters with green makeup on!' We don't get to have those props."

One of the most unique concepts in the novel is the ability of the three witches to "tesser," or mentally transport themselves (and others) from one place to another. The trick for Hutzel: how to achieve this effect? "Tesseracting is a property of gifted individuals who can travel in their minds, not only to imaginary places, but physical places as well," said the effects specialist. "The visual effect is basically an elaborate, on-set process, which actually is still in development."

"The actual tesseracting travel is achieved as a series of images, with very little special-effects work; primarily live-action and in-camera. The on-set of the tesseracting and the arrival will be visual effects, but the actual travelling will be mostly in-camera, which I think is a very bold choice on [Harrison's] part."

"The tesseracting itself is described in the book as 'crushing blackness.' I realized immediately [that that effect would be] one of my greatest challenges. It will be primarily computer-generated material, and the animation will also be a challenge."

Although the production was still in full swing at the time of this interview, Hutzel already had a favorite scene: "We should have some interesting moments on the plateau of the planet Uriel. At one point, the beings who bring the children to save their father collect on a plateau above the planet, and discuss the fate of the children and their father. I think that will be one of our more interesting, live-action sequences, [as much for] the subtle treatment of the [planet's] environment. I'm actually looking forward to the darker elements. There are a lot of nice opportunities in the animation."

"I prefer to integrate the effects with the storylines and get past without noticing," said Hutzel. "That's my goal and the director's intention. In fact, one of the first things [Harrison] said was, 'When we see a visual effect, it should be in the background...' I actually enjoy that approach. It's more challenging. It allows me to make more subtle moves. I don't have to steal the scene in this show."

"Although the book can be classified as fantasy, it's not being produced that way. The real heart of the book is not fantasy. It's more about the intellectual concepts and ideas of mind and people than about fantasy. That's the story that's being done in this picture. The fantasy is taking a back seat—they go to places and faraway worlds, they see amazing things, but that's not the thing. They're there to find their father."

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# CFQ Reviews

## Apocalypse Again and Again

By Dan Persons

The Japanese know something about the Apocalypse. Some five-plus decades after they paid the greatest price imaginable for their world-conquering ambitions, city-leveling finales have become such a staple feature of their popular culture that one has to wonder whether any cathartic benefit still exists in the repeated invocations. It's not really our place to analyze how a culture comes to embrace the darkest moment in its history, nor how that culture is transformed by such an embrace. Having recently been yanked out of our own sense of entitled security, though, it's not a stretch to suggest that—in surveying several recent, high-profile anime releases—we might learn something about how our own culture will respond in the face of catastrophic destruction.

Some viewers are likely to experience sweaty palms while watching METROPOLIS, given that the film opens with an elaborate, and frankly breath-taking, survey of the Ziggurat, a mammoth skyscraper whose completion is the film's central focus, and whose ultimate fate is patently telegraphed in the hubris-laden pronouncements that comprise the building's opening ceremonies. The analogy to our own recent history is clear, if inadvertent (which may explain why domestic distributor Sony Pictures Entertainment seems to have developed a case of cold-feet when it comes to an-

nouncing a release date). Even so, the Ziggurat and its impending doom are by no means the key selling points of this visually lavish and thematically complex production.

METROPOLIS saw life first as an epic comic written and drawn by the "Godfather of Manga," Osamu Tezuka. Tezuka is probably best known in the U.S. for his TV series TETSUWAN ATOM, here known as ASTRO BOY, the story of an invincible, benevolent—and tellingly atom-powered—robot boy. Robots—their place in society and their potential for supplanting their creators—figure prominently as well in METROPOLIS, where an armed vigilante force patrols the futuristic city, making sure its more mechanical inhabitants know their place, and the mastermind of the Ziggurat is also funding the genesis of a young girl—not quite human and certainly not all machine—whose ultimate destiny is shrouded in mystery.

Or confusion. The fact is, METROPOLIS is so loaded with characters and sub-plots—at any point dogged detectives may be in hot-pursuit of renegade vivisectionists who may be coming face-to-face with father-conflicted, adolescent vigilantes who may be trying to forestall an armed coup by a band of revolutionaries—that what purpose the robot girl is supposed to serve gets lost in all the noise. That may not be as much of a drawback as it first appears; in a film this rich in event and motivation, the fact that one of its central

characters is as much a Maguffin as the shining tower she occupies can be excused.

Such excuses are made even easier by the ambitious production that surrounds her story. Directed by the single-monikered Rintaro (who also helmed the somewhat similar-in-theme GALAXY EXPRESS 999 and the profoundly overrated X) and adapted by Katsuhiro Otomo (who here mixes the dark nihilism of his AKIRA with the more antic satire of both his ROUJIN Z and his wrap-arounds for ROBOT CARNIVAL), METROPOLIS represents a seemingly deliberate attempt to resurrect the lush, visual style that typified Japanese animation prior, ironically, to Tezuka's own, budget-conscious ASTRO BOY. The film revels in long-shots, so much so that it becomes something of a pain to watch on video (Sony, re-think your hesitation about a theatrical release!). Within those heavily CG-fortified frames, the city of Metropolis teems with complex architecture and equally intricate life. Visually, the film is a clear nod not only to the deco-influenced style of Fritz Lang's original METROPOLIS (whose plot points also pop up here and there in the animated film's scenario), but to the beaux-arts complexity of Winsor McKay, an impression emphasized by the incorporation of Tezuka's own cartoonish caricatures into the elaborate environment. While whole sequences mounted at distance can seem less like compelling drama than like some sort of dystopic *Where's Waldo?*, the energy, thought, and spirit that's been clearly plowed into this production makes it one of the new landmarks of Japanese animation.

Mamoru Oshii also seems determined to make a bit of history, although, in his case, the ambition may well extend beyond the film frame. While, in concert with his regular animation house, Production I G, the auteur of GHOST IN THE SHELL has been working to bring a darker, more realistic style to Japanese animation, he also hasn't shied away from imbuing his films with a social outlook that can be challenging at least, and controversial at the extreme. He's been backing away from his directorial role of late, preferring more to

## Metropolis

Sony Pictures Entertainment, 2001. Voices: Yuka Imoto, Kei Kobayashi, Kohki Okada, Kousei Tomita, Norio Wakamoto. Directed by Rintaro. Screenplay by Katsuhiro Otomo, based on the manga by Osamu Tezuka. Produced by Metropolis Committee. Character Design/Chief Key-Animation Supervisor: Yasuhiro Nakura.

## Jin-Roh: The Wolf Brigade

Viz, 2001. Voices: Michael Dobson, Moneca Stori, Doug Abrahams, Colin Murdock. Directed by Hiroyuki Okiura. Written by Mamoru Oshii. Produced by Satoshi Kanuma and Toshifumi Yoshida. Art Director: Hiromasa Ogura.

## Blood: The Last Vampire

Manga, 2001. Voices: Youki Kudoh, Saemi Nakamura, Joe Romersa, Rebecca Forstadt. Directed by Hiroyuki Kitakubo. Written by Kenji Kamiyama. Produced by Yukio Nagasaki and Ryuji Mitsumoto. Character Design: Katsuya Terada. Director of Visual Concept: Hisashi Ezura. Animation Director: Kazuchika Kise.



Jin-Roh

serve either as story-initiator or sometimes just overall project mentor (no doubt to free himself for his expressed goal of helming live-action projects). Whether his influence is direct or spiritual, though, his often enigmatic stamp on a project makes it instantly recognizable, and almost always worth a look.

JIN-ROH: THE WOLF BRIGADE is based on a script by Oshii, which in itself was based on a live-action film he wrote and directed. An alt-history drama, the film takes place in the 1960's, in a world where the Axis won the war and the Germans then turned on their allies, reducing Japan to an occupied country. It's a decidedly uneasy peace we observe: Society seems fairly settled and prosper-



Blood



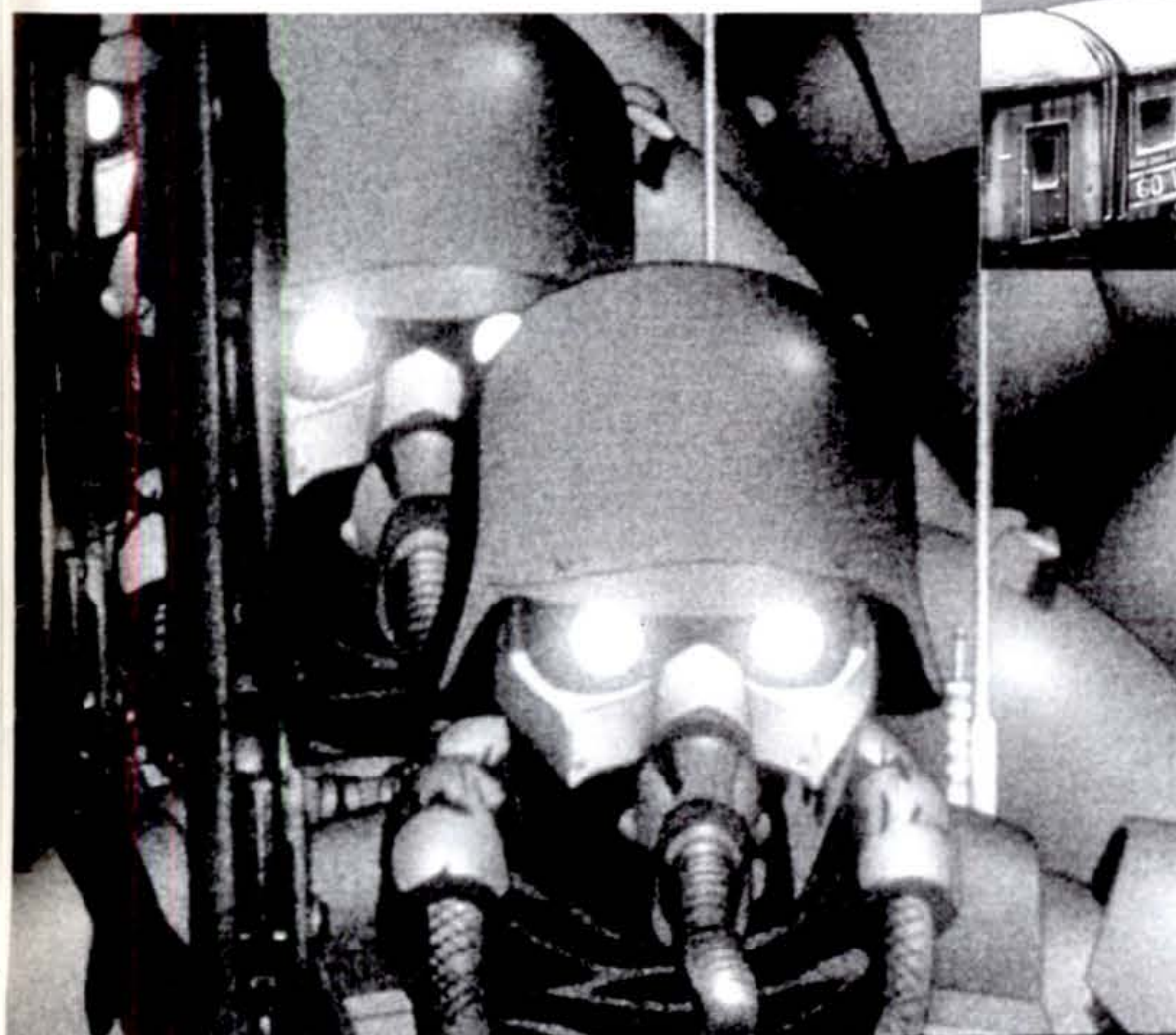
# CFQ Reviews

ous—not much different, one might presume, from the real Japan at this particular time—yet riots are omnipresent, and the successes of a band of terrorist bombers has prompted a strenuous response from the government. The storm troopers called in to fight this war—swathed head-to-foot in protective garb and equipped with ominous red night-vision goggles—find themselves confronting their own countrymen, and their doubts about their actions.

One such soldier, Fusè, finds himself at the breaking point. Having refused to fire upon a young,

keeps things so low-keyed and desperate, despite the frequent outbreaks of violence, that it appears the only alternative available to JIN-ROH's characters is "worse." This may not play well for anyone who feels the world has finally been snapped into a compelling us-

## Metropolis



bomb-wielding terrorist—and having been rewarded for his efforts with the sight of the girl using the device to kill herself—the man finds himself pursuing a woman who may or may not be the girl's sister, even as he himself is being pursued, and perhaps courted, by a renegade army faction, the Wolf Brigade. Set against a bizarre, sado-masochistic retelling of *Little Red Riding Hood*, JIN-ROH eventually drops its political trappings, becoming more a tale of manipulation and betrayal, and an observation of what happens to humanity when no one can be trusted.

Ohsii's ambivalent worldview plays through the entire film. There's no good or bad here—in fact, director Hiroyuki Okiura

versus-them paradigm; in fact, it may not even play for anyone more sympathetic to Ohsii's attitudes—so crowded is the scenario with moral grays that the plotline tends to soften to an indistinct blur by the end. Still, at a point when we've embarked on a mission to impose our own, polar morality to a world where motivations are inevitably more nuanced, it might be worthwhile to remind ourselves that not everything is clear-cut good and evil, and those who would manipulate us to make such distinctions, on either side of the conflict, may do so for suspect reasons.

The plotline of *BLOOD: THE LAST VAMPIRE* is in no way clogged up with moral complexi-

ties. In fact, there's not much of a plot to the film per se. Also emerging from Production I G, with Mr. Ohsii here apparently serving mostly in his mentor role, the film can be summed up thusly: Sometime in the early/mid-'60s, on an American military installation based in Japan, a sword-wielding, otherworldly little girl stalks and dispatches several fang-wielding, otherworldly creatures. Clocked to a tight, forty-five minutes, *BLOOD* spends its first half pretty much setting up its scenario—weirdest moment here has to be the sight of Saya, the stalker, wandering around the base in a Japanese schoolgirl sailor suit that does nothing to conceal her disconcertingly ripe figure—and the last half to the culmination of that set-up: An extended chase sequence that takes characters, and slaughter, from a base infirmary to a raucous Halloween party to a deserted car pool and out onto a tarmac where planes are taking off to deliver troops to their assignments in Vietnam.

That last half is something to see. Essentially a finger-exercise to allow I G's artists to try out several revolutionary concepts in digital animation, *BLOOD*'s latter twenty minutes become a magnificent example of head-on action, beautifully envisioned and tightly edited. It is as stirring an article of pure film as anything released this year—no wonder the producers sought out, and won, the praise of

James Cameron.

Its politics, though, are likely to give western viewers pause. The presence of American military on Japanese soil remains an ongoing controversy, and director Hiroyuki Kitakubo has not spared the U.S. much love here. Soldiers and citizens are portrayed, at best, as clueless and, at worst, as totally useless (and a black security officer is given such an offensive caricature that one can only hope the exaggerations were done in pure innocence). Set on Halloween eve, the film posits the base's entire population attending a costume party in which the band strikes up circa-'40s swing music, even as the troop carriers rumble off the strip, carrying their cargo into one of the grimmest chapters of U.S. history.

Such sledgehammer symbolism is not characteristic of Ohsii and I G (even if one suspects that there were many in the military at that time who were as culturally tone-deaf as depicted here). The outlook manages to sour what otherwise is an intriguing bit of filmmaking. Yet there's also something valuable here, something in seeing ourselves beyond the self-perceived nobility of our motivations. That *BLOOD* can excite and offend at the same time gives it a power unexpected for a film of its length. Its message may be suspect, yet it remains worthy of consideration by anyone with the courage to face it.

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# CFQ Reviews

## The Battle of the B's

By Dennis Kleinman

Here's a serviceable plot for a B-movie: An obsessed individual takes something that is on the verge of death and finds a way, through weird science or occult acumen, to artificially keep it alive. Now that I think of it, it would make a nice plot for a John Carpenter movie, one based on the director's personal experience. Carpenter has made a career of keeping something alive long after its natural time of passing, namely, B-movies.

Take his latest flick, *GHOSTS OF MARS*. Corpses hang from the rafters. Pam Grier gets her head impaled on a stick. Ice-Cube blasts away simultaneously with two semi-automatic weapons while hurtling headlong into the jaws of death—your basic B-movie heaven. What makes this competently directed, scripted, and acted low-budget thriller unusual and interesting is that in the days of the mega-blockbuster, *GHOSTS OF MARS* is appearing at a multiplex near you. These days, B-type movies, with their substantially lower budgets, are generally targeted directly at cable outlets or the video bins. John Carpenter, by sticking to his guns and aiming low, has managed to keep his movies from going the way of the exercise video.

Back in the day, when people spent a bigger chunk of their life at the movies, the B-movie was just there to fill out the bill. The A-movie was what was being promoted and what brought people in to the theater. In the '50s, though, the B's took on a vibrant, idiosyncratic life of their own. While the top of the bill was often carefully crafted, conformist twaddle starring the likes of Doris Day and Rock Hudson, the bottom of the bill placed much fewer constraints on its creators. The result was small masterpieces like Don Siegel's *INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS* and Jack Arnold's *IT CAME FROM OUTER SPACE*, movies that delivered messages in subtext that the complacent '50s audience didn't want to hear overtly.

It is this big idea/small budget kind of movie that inspired horror-meisters like Carpenter and David Cronenberg, pushing the bounds of sci-fi and horror visually and thematically. But while Cronenberg moved on, Carpenter in general has remained true to his roots. Starting with his first hit, *HALLOWEEN* (1979), he has continued to impart both cheap thrills and social commentary with, by Hollywood standards at least, paltry sums.

But it was more than just the "fun" of stalking and murdering idiot teenagers that made *HALLOWEEN* both a commercial and critical success. It was the way in which Carpenter captured the explosive sexual tensions of the moment. Women were being liberated. Men were getting mad. Mad enough to....

*GHOSTS OF MARS* treads in very similar psychic territory. Melanie (Nastasha Henstridge) is a police-woman on Mars, a planet that humans have been colonizing for some time. She has been brought before a tribunal that is trying to get to the bottom of a disaster which befell her police unit while in the process of transporting a vicious criminal back to the administrative city of Chryse. All the members of Ms. Henstridge's outfit have been wiped

out, and the tribunal wants answers.

The tale that Melanie tells is a gruesome one. Upon arriving to receive the prisoner, they find the town where the prisoner is being held void of life, its inhabitants decapitated and hanging from the rafters. As the layers of the mystery are peeled away, we learn that an ominous red dust is "possessing" the humans of Mars and causing them to destroy their fellow humans.

Luckily for our species, the prisoner to be transported is "Desolation" Williams (Ice Cube), the baddest motherf\*ck\*r on the planet, and probably the whole motherf\*ck\*n' universe. In true John Carpenter style, Desolation, an ornery, anti-social career criminal, is the male hero of the movie. Like Carpenter's most memorable character, "Snake" Plissken from *ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK* and *ESCAPE FROM L.A.*, Desolation is pressed into service for a good cause, basically to make Mars a safer place for humans. He, however, couldn't care less about the cause, and does what he does in the name of self-preservation, loyalty to his own, and the thrill of outright slaughter.

This criminal-as-hero side of Carpenter also stems from the '50s B-movie canon. Movies like *THE WILD ONE*, starring Marlon Brando, lionized marginally criminal types, setting them off against narrow-minded, marginally corrupt authority figures. In Carpenter, this is pushed to an extreme. Authority in Carpenter's movies is either corrupt beyond redemption or stupid beyond belief, while the heroes are full-blown, violence-loving banditos, albeit ones with some redeeming qualities like loyalty and compassion.

Henstridge, who is a kind of joyless Julia Roberts, and Cube, whose face is so interesting you can almost forgive his lack of effort in the acting department, become an unstoppable team, kicking major Martian ghost butt. There are some fine action sequences where the Earth contingent mixes it up with Team Mars, and the movie manages to stay mostly on track, suspense-wise. But the plotting is forced and unimaginative, the characters one dimension below flat, and the dialogue thick with declamatory bricks. (At one point, Ms. Henstridge an-

## John Carpenter's Ghosts of Mars

Screen Gems, 2001. Starring Nastasha Henstridge, Ice Cube, Pam Grier, Clea DuVall. Directed by John Carpenter. Written by Larry Sulkis and John Carpenter. Produced by Sandy King. Cinematography: Gary B. Kibbe. Original music: Anthrax. John Carpenter. R (U.S.)

nounces, "This is about dominion!" which should win her the prestigious "Best Use of the Word 'Dominion' in Movie Dialogue" Award).

But the aspect of *GHOSTS OF MARS* that feels the most undercooked are the ghosts themselves. We get very little information about them, other than that they are seeking revenge against the Earthlings who have taken over their planet. In the movie's most gripping sequence, Ms. Henstridge is herself possessed by the red dust, experiencing life from a Martian ghost's point of view. When she recovers, however, all she has learned is that the Martians hate the creatures that have taken over their world, and are determined to destroy every last one of them.

Like *HALLOWEEN* and several other movies of the Carpenter *oeuvre*, the enemy is vicious, unstoppable, unredeemable, and an empty slate. And, as with *HALLOWEEN*, I believe there is a reason for this: Carpenter, like his '50s predecessors, has a hidden agenda for his movie, a sub-textual connection between his Martian villains and some aspect of our current culture, a connection that is easier to maintain if the enemy is kept vague.

Hints as to what that subtext might be are given in the movie's opening exposition, where we learn that human society on Mars is run by women. Add to this the prominent pairing of a woman with a male minority-group member as the butt-kicking power center of the movie, and *GHOSTS OF MARS* reveals itself as an allegory of multi-culturalism and its discontents, the ghosts representing all those displaced white guys whose dominion has been usurped. These men are mad. Mad enough to....

Is this "rage of the castrated white man" subtext enough to make *GHOSTS OF MARS* a good movie? No. But it is more than enough to make it a good B-movie—a B-movie you will still have to cough up nine bucks at the box office in order to see. *CFQ*



Ghosts of Mars



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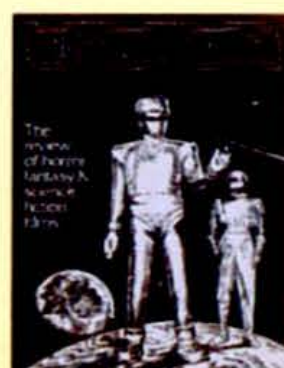
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